



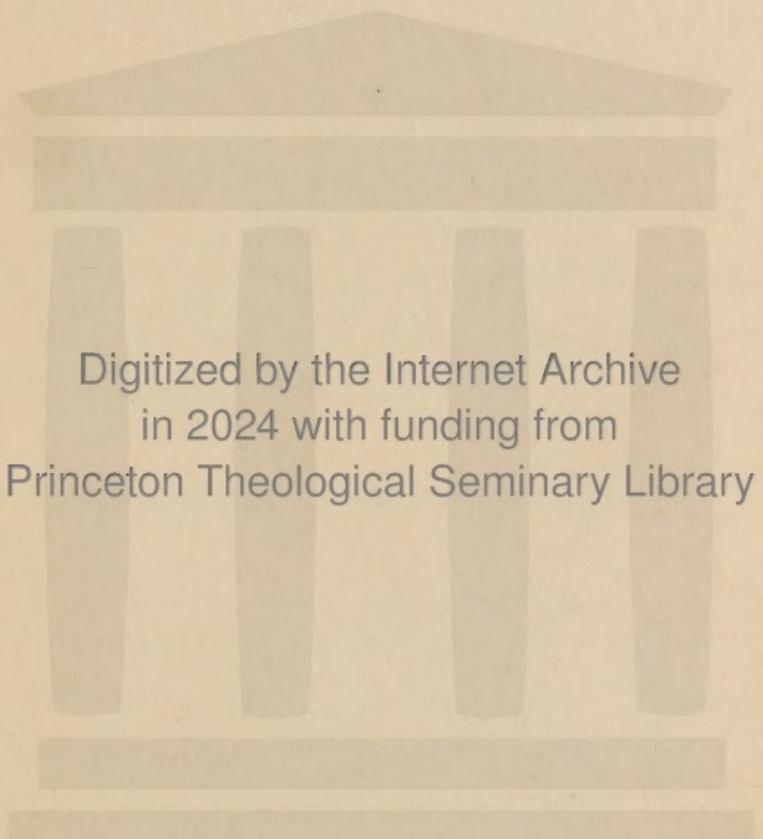


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REV. W. L. WATKINSON

*LIFE AND CHRIST*

BY EBENEZER E. JENKINS, LL.D.

London:

CHARLES H. KELLY

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1896

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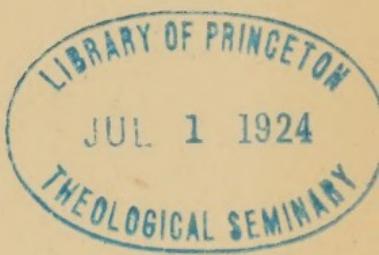
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BY

✓ EBENEZER E. JENKINS, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "MODERN ATHEISM" "ADDRESSES AND SERMONS" ETC.



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TO THE  
REV. JOHN JENKINS, D.D., LL.D.  
*This Volume*  
IS INSCRIBED BY HIS BROTHER  
WITH REVERENCE AND GRATITUDE



## CONTENTS

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	PAGE
CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF LIFE . . . . .	3
THE RELATION OF THOUGHT TO CHRIST . . . . .	17
THE BEAUTY OF LIFE . . . . .	31
THE SOURCE OF LIFE . . . . .	47
THE REFLECTION OF LIFE . . . . .	61
THE WALK OF LIFE . . . . .	75
THE FIGHT OF LIFE . . . . .	89
TEMPTATION . . . . .	103
THE LORD THINKETH UPON ME . . . . .	115
THE SANCTUARY OF LIFE . . . . .	131
THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN THE WORLD . . . . .	143
THE MASSES . . . . .	155
GOSPEL ACCOMMODATION . . . . .	167
"MIGHTY TO SAVE" . . . . .	181
THE FAITHFUL SAYING . . . . .	195
THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE CROSS . . . . .	209
KEEPING THE FAITH . . . . .	223
JESUS CHRIST NOT YEA AND NAY . . . . .	237
A REVELATION BY THE WAY . . . . .	253
THE GLORY OF MAN, AND THE GLORY OF GOD . . . . .	267
THANKSGIVING . . . . .	283
THE RACE OF LIFE . . . . .	297
CURRENT EVENTS . . . . .	309



I

Christ's Knowledge of Life



## CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF LIFE

Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ ?—JOHN iv. 29.

THIS judgment of the Samaritan woman on the claims of Jesus to be considered a divine teacher is the verdict of common sense. It may be interesting to compare it with the verdict of scholarship pronounced by the learned Nicodemus : “ We know that thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him ” (John iii. 2). It is for cultured men to study the question of miracles, and to decide whether the works which are ascribed to Jesus are so far distinguished from other marvellous achievements, both in their nature and in their purpose, as to demonstrate the interposition of God. The testimony of miracles is a legitimate basis of revelation ; and the historic position of Christian miracles is impregnable. But that which secures for Jesus the faith and the heart of the common mind is the inner revelation of His word. It is true that the masses are moved by prodigies ; for when thought has little authority within us, the eye and the ear sway the attention of the will. But this kind of impression is only an incidental result of miracles, and does not describe the work they were intended to do, or point out the place they were intended to fill in the body of Christian evidence. They are the hidden foundations of intellectual belief,

inexpressibly precious for the firmness they impart to the doctrines and experiences that rest upon them. But the active agent of belief in Jesus, and of Christian discipleship, is the word which He speaks to us. *He tells us all things that ever we did.*

In Christ's conversation with the woman of Samaria we may observe that His words were a riddle until His teaching touched upon her life. An unexpected fact startled her into seriousness and conviction, that her life was not only a story known within the limited circle of her relatives and neighbours, but that there had been another witness of it, and another kind of witness; not a witness of incidents and a hearer of rumours, but an observer who, unseen, had been ever present in her inner mind, cognisant of the entire source and history of its wanderings; in one word, there was another person than herself in the secret of her life. Of the many truths which she heard during the conversation, this was the arrow that struck her; and though at first she affected not to regard the wound, and talked on as if there had been no pang of remorse, this was the truth that drew her to Christ and prepared her for the revelation, "I that speak unto thee am He." The burden of her proclamation was not, "Come, see a man who declared that God is a spirit," but, "a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

Among the teachers of men we accord the highest rank to those who teach us how to live. In society we give precedence to the statesman: for government is a great business; nothing can prosper if this fails; and the highest capacity is demanded and the gravest responsibilities incurred in the case of men who undertake to adjust the forces and stimulate the growth of social life. For

a similar reason, writers on human life and human character take a higher position than the mere scientist; and if in the present day the speculations of scientific explorers have won for their field an unusual amount of attention, it is because their inquiries bear upon the nature of man, and their supposed discoveries affect the deep questions of his origin and his future, and indirectly, but most sensibly, the department of law and morals. This is the secret of the fascinations of science. In the scientific world itself the question that inspires nearly all its labours is, *What is man?* and this question derives its significance from two others which are inseparable from it: *What is he appointed to do?* and *what is he destined to be?* It is evident, therefore, that if for the moment the scientist is more popular than the moralist, it is because he thinks it probable that his investigations will evolve a new theory of life, and that he will become the moralist himself. Thus it is made clear that among teachers the foremost names are found in the literature of morals and character.

Why do all men reverence the genius of Shakespeare? Because of his profound insight into the springs of life, and his matchless art of exhibiting a glass in which we see the embryo of human character acquiring structure, maturing itself or failing to mature itself: thereby teaching us by the most impressive forms how men climb to greatness or sink to infamy; revealing the secret operation of motives, even the hidden counsels of the heart; touching the lighter and sportive moods of life; showing us that contentment and happiness are not commanded by power, or purchased by wealth. The world knew all this before it knew Shakespeare; but he tells us what we do and what we are, and in a style of description which no apathy can resist; we are com-

elled to look at ourselves in the pictures of the dramatist. And then beside the great scenes of this incomparable painter of human manners, there are scattered through all his works strokes of genius, gems of writing, in which within the compass of a couplet you have a maxim, a precept, a thought of immortal worth—belonging now to earth's treasury of wisdom. This kind of instruction the world is unwilling to let die; it never grows old. Writings on human character seem to have no date; with them one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Any one that professes to add another ray to the imperfect light that now shines upon the nature of man will be sure to command attention.

Whatever view may be taken of Christ's knowledge of man, it will at once be conceded that no subsequent teacher has made any addition to it. The most valuable contributions to ethical knowledge which have been made since the publication of the New Testament have been expositions of the words of Jesus. We know of nothing that helps us to define the position of man upon the earth, and to know the causes that have made that position what it is, which cannot be traced to the Sermon on the Mount. There is no account which has been given us during the Christian era by any student of man, of his intellectual capacity, of his moral endowments, and of the possibilities of human advancement, which has not been borrowed from the sayings or inspired by the life of Jesus; and as for the writings that preceded Christ, excluding biblical Scriptures, which belonged to Him since they were created by the hope of His appearing, we need not bring them into the comparison, because there is such a gulf between the obscurities and uncertain foundations of pagan

teaching on man, and the large, clear, and authoritative revelations of Christ, that you can scarcely connect them except by very remote analogies. We admit that pagan writers described man as they saw him; and their works abound in exquisite delineations of human character, and in splendid narratives of human achievements; and here and there are maxims of profound penetration and excellent wisdom. But their defect as teachers and guides was their ignorance of the history of man; they were unable to connect him historically with the beginning of the race, and therefore did not know whether the varieties they saw had originally an equal rank; and they were unable also to account for the moral evil which seemed to be as much a part of his nature as moral good. These two problems, as they defied reason, had been remitted to the imagination, and found ready expression in the elegant absurdities of mythology. While the questions as to the unity of the race and the origin of evil remained unanswered, moral teaching was restricted to local experience, and what it wanted in breadth of knowledge it lacked in authority.

If it be objected to this that we are begging the question, since these very doctrines are as unsettled as ever, we reply that our great Teacher not only considered them established, but delivered, in precise statement, the historic fact of the creation of the parents of our race, and of their fall, and the hereditary taint of their children (Matt. xix. 4, 5; vii. 11). Where is the consistency of applauding the teaching of Christ, of confessing that in depth of insight into the spirit of man no other instructor has even approached Him, and then rejecting His declarations concerning the beginning of our race and the cause of our

degeneracy? His precepts are founded on His knowledge of the whole case: you take the precepts and repudiate the knowledge. You say that He is the foremost Teacher of all time; you go further, and admit that He is the rule by which the correctness of all moral teaching must be measured, and you are bound to show the reason of this unequalled ascendancy. It is trifling to say that He happened to be the greatest Teacher, as Shakespeare happened to be the greatest dramatist; and it is uncritical to examine the statements and sayings of Jesus upon what you conceive to be the necessary limitations of human knowledge, affirming arbitrarily that He was correct in this doctrine and mistaken in that, while you practically confess, in the pre-eminence you assign to Him, that He is beyond your criticism. Do what you will with the life and teaching of Jesus, bring to the examination of them every new method of analysis and research, every new fact on the antiquity of man, and the last speculation of the evolutionist or the metaphysician, you leave the Redeemer of the world where you found Him. He is lifted up above His fellows, above the reach of their following and their praise; the most knowing, the most pure, the most mighty in shaping other minds, and the sole Author of the only progressive civilisation in the world.

There are two movements in regard to Christ which are now running parallel with each other; they are equally vigorous and conspicuous, and yet they should be mutually destructive: an anti-Christian scepticism, and a growing belief in Jesus. It would be worse than folly to conceal from ourselves the formidable antagonism of modern unbelief: but lest we should fall into the equally mischievous error of exaggerating its power, let it be remem-

bered that the ungodliness of every age always assumes the features of that age ; it catches the intellectual cast or manner of the moment, borrows its language to dress up its levities and its banter, and must not be understood to indicate the real convictions and judgment of society. But there is a growing belief in Jesus ; not so much fostered by the current literature of the Church, by books that profess to exhibit the life of Christ, by attempts to refute, reconcile, or conciliate scientific objections, as by the swift dissemination of the words themselves of Jesus. In the blessed Scriptures recording His sayings, describing His acts, and unfolding in gradual disclosures, according to the diligent sincerity of the reader, His infinite character, He is in the many-tongued Bible walking through the nations of the world as it were upon the wings of the wind. Outside the people who are called by His name, men are reading the Gospels. They cannot read Churches, they shrink from attempting to decipher ecclesiastical acts, they dread or despise the nomenclature of creeds, councils, and convocations : but the New Testament is no Church book, it belongs to no party ; if Christianity is anything, that which it *is* is in the records of this volume ; and men are drawing near to this source, as travellers exhausted in a desert, coming from different directions, and attracted by the signs of water, meet at a desert well. Multitudes unregistered in Churches and unknown in the returns of Missionary Reports, are trying to slake their thirst at the living well which from New Testament ground is springing up into everlasting life. The well may be too deep for their reason, and at first they may have no faith to draw with ; but thirst is not only an importunate, it is a wonderfully ingenious appetite. It will cling to a rock, and say, "I will

not let thee go, except thou bless me!" If the spring lies hidden anywhere, thirst will find it out.

So much even for the eagerness and hope of desire. But the Stranger who sat upon the Samaritan well is still in the world, not now restricted within bodily limitations and local nationalities; His personal presence is as diffusive and as intimately in contact with men as the air they breathe; and the voice that struck upon the ear of a little company of Jews is now heard within the heart of millions of wayworn, fainting spirits, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink" (John vii. 37). He who led the solitary reader in Gaza to open upon Isaiah and to pause upon a scripture that contained what he wanted, if he could only know how to fetch it out, did not tell that man to join himself to the Church in order to learn, but commanded the Church to join itself to him—to leave its sanctuaries and establishments, and to go into deserts seeking for souls. And with vast and increasing numbers of people who are drawn to the Scriptures by one motive or another, who have no connexion with us or with any body of Christians, except the common thirst and the common well, it is not merely a duty, but *the vocation* of Churches to plant themselves on the highways of thought and of life, and to watch for those travellers who are parched and faint, and to let the voice of the Holy Ghost be heard, not in harsh commands, but in His own winning tones of invitation: "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life *freely*."

Our hope for the world is not in the thoughtful intelligence and multiform features of the Christian press, nor is it in the organisation of the forces of the Church: it is in the strange, the indescribable power of the divine word, its

accusing revelations to the reader or the hearer, telling him all things that ever he did ; telling him as a man, bringing his life before him, and the circumstances which have made that life what it is. It matters not who or what he is, he finds himself there in accurate description, his judgment of what is right confirmed, his reasoning upon what is doubtful enlightened ; and phases of thought and desire which he had never divulged, to which indeed he had never been able to give a name or assign a place in consciousness, he meets them there, not in the shadowy forms of suggestion and speculation, but in the distinct shape and historic order of facts ; and he meets them nowhere else. The corruptions of his heart, the snares of his path, his frequent deceptions and falls, the ineffectual struggles of his better sense, and his musings upon what he possibly might have been under other conditions, all these are not only shown to him and recognised by him as the counterpart of himself, but he finds them connected with what he did not know. They are traced back to their source and carried forward to their issue, and he cannot well hesitate to accept the new matter because it seems to complete the account of himself. It is but natural that the word which tells him all things that ever he did, should be able to tell him why he did them. *To admit the revelation of what he has done is to admit the revelation of everything which concerns him.* If I find in the words of Jesus an insight into the secret life of my heart, and if it happens that those words are to every human being who studies them what they are to me, the knowledge of Jesus cannot be supposed to end here. He that knows my nature as it is, must know more than this ; must know why I am as I am, how I might be other than I am, and what I ought to be. The common reader or hearer may not

be able to reason this out, does not as a rule attempt it; but there is something within us which gives in an instant the result of reasoning. When the self-revealing word of Jesus has possession of us, we do not generally pause before the problem of His omniscience, but instinctively cry out, "Is not this the Christ?" When men have been compelled to accept Christ's disclosure of themselves, they are led irresistibly to admit the divinity of the Teacher.

This power of the word is our hope for the world; but not this alone. Behind the written word and the word proclaimed there is ONE unknown to the world, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him, whose abode is in the text of the word, and in the heart of the reader, the historian, the prophet, the commentator, and the preacher in one, the Lord and Giver of knowledge and of life, who is not only in the Church, but in the world to make the world the Church, whose union with Jesus and His work is described in words of equal plainness and significance: "He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you" (John xvi. 14); and again, "I will send Him unto you: and when He is come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John xvi. 8). The Holy Ghost is in the world, having long patience until the Church shall overtake her work; opening doors into hitherto inaccessible nations, castes, and societies; preparing the way for the word, and following the word in the way; preventing it where it runs swiftly, quickening its progress where it lags; never allowing a rumour of Jesus to fly about unattended; and as separately watching the individual in the throng as if there were none to be saved but he. When the intellect of the reader is impressed by the revelations of Christ's teaching and by the ascendancy of His authority,

when as the mere result of observation and comparison he gives Jesus an unrivalled position among the teachers of men, the Holy Spirit is there to enforce the conviction that such a homage of the understanding is an inconsistent and a useless admiration unless it be followed by the worship of the heart and the surrender of the life.

Let me speak directly to you whose knowledge of the self-disclosing revelations of this word has convinced you that He who spake them is divine. If you stop with this conviction, if you prevent it from carrying on the heart to submission and discipleship, are you not in direct rebellion against the Spirit of truth? We cannot separate from His ministry the earliest operations of the word; but it is at this point that your responsibility begins: from this moment insubmission proclaims your confession to be faithless and hollow. You may try to defend its sincerity; you may seek to relieve the pressure of your terrible responsibility by simply adjourning the business of adding consecration to confession. His voice speaks within you to-day—that voice says: “To-day your conviction of Christ’s right to command your service is accomplished, and this makes it the accepted time for the dedication of that service: *to-day* should be the day of your salvation.” If you hear that voice, harden not your heart, displease not Him that speaketh *now*, by the pretence of a necessary delay until to-morrow. “*See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven*” (Heb. xii. 25).

Let me in conclusion urge upon those to whom the revelation of the Messiah has been made, the example of the Samaritan woman. Cry out to your children, to your neigh-

bours, to your fellow-citizens, to every human being with whom you may associate : "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ ?" God has confided to you the proclamation of Jesus and His mission. That He is the Saviour of all is a gospel which equally concerns all. Not to hear it, and to die without hearing it, is the greatest calamity that can befall a human being ; but for a man to know it, to have had the secret conveyed to him that God hath loved him, and that Jesus is God's Son, who died to deliver him from death, and to conceal the fact from another man who has an equal right to know it, and whose salvation depends upon his knowing it, is a crime, the intolerable baseness of which were sufficient, if the offence were understood, to brand a man with infamy. It is true that God raises up a special order of men to preach the gospel and to organise Churches ; but this does not in any degree affect the duty of testimony on the part of each disciple. The witness of a convert is an instrument as divinely appointed as the sermon of an evangelist. You know where the Rock of men's salvation is ; you know that within it there is a cleft from which a spring of living water wells up ; some friend when you were dying with thirst led you to the spot ; you tasted, you drank of this water of life freely, and you live. You meet travellers with an empty flask and a failing hope, whose knees bend under them with exhaustion, who sink upon the desert of life, within touch of the Rock, almost within hearing of the murmur of the spring : will you dare to keep from them any longer the secret of the well ? Oh ! lead them to it, save a soul from death and your own soul from bloodguiltiness, and the blessing of him that was ready to perish shall come upon you.

II

The Relation of Thought to Christ



## THE RELATION OF THOUGHT TO CHRIST

Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience  
of Christ.—2 COR. x. 5.

THE word thought here comprehends in the first place the intellect, in the second place the will. Bring the entire intellect and the entire will into subjection to Christ. The apostle selects a word which includes thought proper, the source and the whole procession of the thinking faculty, and the purpose, or that state of mind which immediately precedes conduct, the disposition which is the sum of a man's desires and feelings.

We must observe first that the text is an indirect affirmation of the Deity of Christ. There are in the New Testament formal declarations of this essential doctrine, sometimes elaborately defended to meet the demands of controversy, as in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel; sometimes in single paragraphs as the ground of another truth which the writer is mainly expounding, as in several of the epistles of St. Paul. But to us who have the complete revelation before us, there is no argument in support of the Godhead of Christ so impressive and unanswerable as the unconscious assumption of the truth which runs through all New Testament writings. Let any reader adopt the hypothesis of a Christ created by God, which of course means infinitely inferior to God, as the

loftiest creature must be, and nearly every chapter will bring criticism into difficulties, and make thoroughly honest reading impossible.

The text is an instance in which such an hypothesis must break down. If Christ be not God, whatever rank or origin you demand for Him, He is simply a teacher. Now a teacher inculcates doctrine, and may enforce obedience. He wishes to produce within your mind certain results ; it may be conviction, or resolution, or enlargement of idea and knowledge, and if you yourself desire these effects, you must be captive to him and obedient to the conditions upon which such mental states depend. Further than this the teacher, as a teacher, has nothing to do with you. There is a world within you, absolutely unknown to your instructor ; half thoughts, foolish thoughts, fancies, pre-judgments, conflicts between conscience and passion, not to mention the earliest impressions of the mind before one begins to think at all ; these come not within the province of the man who instructs you, and only in so far as you choose to disclose them do they come within the ken of your most intimate companion. No man knoweth such "things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him" (1 Cor. ii. 11). But St. Paul claims for Christ both the knowledge of the human mind, and the subjection of its entire realm of thought : every thought must be in captivity to Christ ; an impossible subordination and an absurd demand upon any other supposition than the Godhead of Christ. The mind captive to God is at least intelligible ; the mind captive to any other being is contrary to sense.

What is meant by the subjection of thought to Christ ? I am not unaware that at least one eminent critic would exclude from this text intellectual subjection, and limit

the word thought to mean the intents of the mind, the aims and purposes of the mind. This of course would only strengthen the observations we have made on the Godhead of Christ as implied in the claim of subjection; but the context and indeed the purport of the epistle will bear out the application which includes the intellect equally with the will. "Casting down imaginations," that is, reasonings, and "every high thing," every lofty edifice "which is being raised against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." St. Paul's stoutest enemy in Corinth was intellectual pride. Licentiousness was another foe; but its appearance was more flagrant when it happened to be in the Church; it was readily exposed and punished. The pride of reason infected the spirit of the whole Christian society in Corinth. In minor matters of taste it would select its ministers, and divide the Church into followers of favourite preachers; in the graver matters of faith, it stumbled at a miracle, many of the members denying the resurrection of the dead, and by implication the rising again of Christ; in the fellowship meetings and social walks of the congregation, the educated classes ridiculed the sensitive scruples and simplicity of their more ignorant brethren.

It is instructive for the ministers and Churches of this day to remember that St. Paul, from the time he entered into Corinth, after he had tasted the learned satire of Mars' Hill, solemnly resolved that he would not allow the fashionable circles of Achaia even the innocent luxury of an elegant style, neither would he conciliate their philosophic tastes by his manner of putting the great themes of his ministry before the people. That he was not unfamiliar with the felicities of diction and the methods

of rhetoric, we have sufficient proof in passages in his writings which as specimens of art have never been excelled. "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. ii. 2). In himself, he was a rare example of intellectual subjection to Jesus, and he demanded it of his general hearers with enthusiasm, and of his Churches with apostolic authority. When his intellectual opponents maintained that the ministry of himself and his brethren was based upon weak things, and foolish things, and things that were not, things that had no existence but in the imagination of the converts, he turned upon them with wonderful adroitness, and, admitting the charge, like a general who feigns a retreat, he suddenly faces the foe, and surprises and defeats him with an unexpected reserve. Yes, he replies, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound you mighty ones, and foolish things of the world to refute you scholars and thinkers, and things that you conceive to be fictions he has chosen to prove that your philosophy and your religion are fictions.

We have been accused of interpreting this subjection to Jesus to mean a restraint upon the liberty of thinking; and those who dispute the authority of Christ call themselves *free thinkers*. If the designation has any meaning at all, and it is not overstocked with meaning, the disciple of Jesus is the only free thinker upon the earth. If it means indiscriminate license of thinking, then the South Sea islander who has not yet been disturbed by the missionary is the freest thinker in the world. He who gave the mind wings will not deny her the franchise of flight. To bring thought

under subjection to Jesus is to secure for it the highest intellectual conditions ; and the limits to its excursions imposed by Him who is both the wisdom and the power of God are not intended to entrammel its faculties, but to educate them.

While subordination and submission to Christ become the human mind in every character it may assume, in every work it may attempt, St. Paul refers in the context to a particular class of knowledge, and presses subjection to Christ as the sole means of obtaining it—the knowledge of God. Here our ground is firm : we stand upon it as upon a rock. It is the heritage of faith. Some men are endeavouring to acquire the knowledge of the First Cause upon other principles ; and to a thoughtful observer, in sympathy with such enquiries, nothing can be more interesting than the efforts of scientific men to pierce the problem of creation, and to discover the original force which by the necessary laws of thought we must suppose to be anterior to it. Is that force a personal intelligence, or simply a first seminal power ? In perhaps the oldest book of the most ancient literature, we have this demand : “Canst thou by searching find out God ? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection ?” (Job xi. 7). The words mean, Canst thou by a purely intellectual process arrive at a true notion of the nature of God ?

How wonderful is the book of the Scriptures ! Here is a question as exactly descriptive of the embarrassments of modern naturalists as when the challenge was made four thousand years ago to the sages of Egypt and Syria. Wouldst thou, disdaining the authority of revealed truth, track the hiding place of the Supreme by the analysis of matter ? “It is as high as heaven ; what canst thou do ? deeper than hell ; what canst thou know ?” (Job xi. 8).

What is the net gain to-day of the naturalist's researches? He himself says, *a more manifest ignorance*. God cannot be known. So that if there be a God, He has made us atheists by arrangement! If there be a God, a presiding Intelligence, He has made it, according to these thinkers, impossible for us to be certain of the fact. He has provided that the legitimate issue of all investigation shall be, in the mind of the ablest and most honest of the explorers, *I do not know*. It therefore follows that the idea which we have of God is not the result of reason, or the gift of revelation, but the luck of accident. Assuming that there is a God, we have guessed it. We have guessed, without His intending it, the sublimest truth in the whole circle of thought or knowledge: more than this, we have worked it up and made a majesty of it, and a throne, and a government: nay, more, we have made a Father of it, and a home for filial service and filial security. Was there ever such an accidental thought as this? How singular the circumstance that it should have occurred to every people; that the rudest tribes should have a notion of it, and that no evolution of races should have been able to stamp it out! How remarkable also that the higher the culture of the race, the more distinct the conception of God and the more influential the worship! And most wonderful of all is the fact, that the laws to which, more than to any other authority, we owe the civilisation, the morality, the prosperity, and the happiness of the world, are derived from that accidental idea which, having no faculties to know it by proof, occurred to the fathers of our race. If we ought to be atheists by the constitution of our mind, how is it we have gained our noblest ideas and our purest sentiments by our resistance of atheism? Surely

this is bringing to nothing the understanding of the prudent. "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Cor. i. 20).

Ministers of religion are accused of preaching against scientific men, and casting upon them and their labours the cheap ridicule of a popular harangue. I believe in most instances the charge is groundless. Their legitimate studies we applaud; the result of their investigations within their own proper world are equally brilliant and permanent; but they cannot lead me from the Creator's works to the Creator. They have proved themselves to be as unable to throw one ray of light upon the problem of the origin of all things, as the primitive atom upon which they speculate; and when they build up a philosophy which professes to reach His abode and to descry His substance, or to deny both, their work belongs to the same class of erections, and will have the same fate as those described in the context. "*The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds: casting down reasonings, and every lofty edifice which is being raised against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*" Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself: but from whom? "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight." Mark what follows: "No man knoweth who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him" (Luke x. 21, 22).

Let us now consider the other side of the text,

which represents the subjection of the aims and purposes of life as well as the distinct intellectual operations of the mind. In the present division of the subject we shall not treat this as a separate act of surrender: we shall unite it with the other, and claim the dedication of the whole to Jesus as the sole means (1) of conversion, and (2) of progress.

1. There are in this congregation seekers of the knowledge of God, and between you and that which you seek there must be this absolute and all-comprehending subjection to Christ. He is the way to the divine grace. He hath procured salvation for you, and all the modes by which it can be presented to you, and all the energies by which its assurance can be wrought in you. You must receive it in the posture of absolute helplessness. You must be silent and passive before the Lord. You are burdened and heavy laden; you have a diseased conscience, a diseased will, a withered heart: no power to obey the law of God, to resist temptation. Bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ: the thought of unreadiness to come just now; the thought of curious enquiry as to whether, if you do come now, the miracle will be done; the thought of how it will be done. Let such considerations be as though they were not: obey, leave everything with Him who commands you, and the healing, the rest, the revelation of Himself will come instantly.

2. *Progress.* Bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, to obtain additional clearness and assurance in the knowledge already possessed. To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance (Matt. xiii. 12). Here is represented every degree of divine knowledge,

and a promise of advancement upon that degree. You who are just emerging from the obscurity of settled unbelief; who have scarcely dared as yet to call yourselves believers; who, if you are questioned as to your faith in Jesus, shrink from the attempt to put your thoughts in the form of an acknowledgment; who see a shape in the dimness of your knowledge, but cannot be sure that that object is Christ: you who have a quick ear for objections, and a slow ear for proofs; who long for the peace of faith, and yet by a curious anomaly are in sympathy with a restless scepticism,—wait upon the Lord whom you indistinctly apprehend; leave with Him the work of producing a clearer witness; He will do it. You cannot increase assurance by balancing testimony as against improbability. Let the Spirit of Christ do His work. Be as passive before Him as was the waste of unformed matter when He came down to move upon it. You can no more dispel the darkness that covers you than could that primal deep. Light comes when He commands; life stirs when He breathes. Then be still and know that He is God (Ps. xlvi. 10).

But this mental captivity to Christ is not only necessary when we pass through the chaos of first impressions and convictions. It is the law of the whole career of progress. The restraints which He imposes touch not the wings of the mind, but the weights of the mind. We are not strictly the prisoners of Christ, but the pupils. Our submission is not inaction on the one side nor the sacrifice of independence on the other. It is the principle of placing our spirit in His hands, and taking from Him the direction of our aims, and the explanation of those mysteries of which He is the sole depositary and the

sole revealer. I would disdain to lie under a difficulty which it is the province of the human understanding to remove. Christ Himself would despise the cowardice or indolence of such inaction. But waiting in the presence of the great mystery of godliness until Christ shall open it, and shrinking through a selfish motive from encountering an ordinary problem, are circumstances essentially different. In the first case we have no ground upon which to reason except that of testimony and feeling, and what is known among us as Christian experience. The mental states required are two, faith and patience ; belief without explanation, and waiting until the explanation shall come.

If I am tempted to resist this humiliation, if my faith be assailed by the revival of objections that once had power over me, or by new antagonistic considerations suddenly introduced, it is my duty, let me rather say privilege, to make these temptations, objections, and considerations captive, and lead them to Christ. He shall contend for me, He shall answer for me ; I yield to Him the right of reply. It is to Him that I owe the steadfastness of my religious convictions, and that redemption from moral weakness which first broke within me the reign of sin ; it is to Him I owe peace of conscience and the vigorous hope of my immortality ; and as He has accomplished this revolution within me, and is still advancing it, I will not disturb His work, as if the clay should resist the modelling of the artist. The speculations that circulate around me I will not condemn ; they may have more within them than I imagine : neither will I accept them ; they may have less within them than I imagine : neither will I enter upon the unsatisfactory work of attempting to reconcile their theories with the sure words

of Christ. As I owe everything in my life and in my home to these words as they stand, and as they have stood for ages, I shall not tamper with their formulas for the purpose of making them give a semblance of authority to a scientific doctrine scarcely a year old, and which may never see its second birthday. We are very much in the dark even with respect to certain truths that are most precious to us. A child's questions might embarrass us, not to mention the suggestions of scientific unbelief: but there are two positions from which no power in earth or heaven shall drive us: first, that the main business of our public life is conduct, and of our inner life is purity; and, secondly, that from the time we began to think of Christ, to believe in Him and to love Him, the inward life grew pure and the outward life correct.



III

The Beauty of Life



## THE BEAUTY OF LIFE

Thou art fairer than the children of men.—PSALM xlv. 2.

THE words, fair, comely, beautiful, belong to a class of expressions in which we condense our idea and judgment of that which is perfect; so that the epithet in the second verse of this psalm sets forth the unrivalled comeliness of the Messiah. This is the leading attribute in the grand eulogy which follows, and may be said to contain within itself the entire account of the person, the achievements, and the destiny of Christ. He is beautiful, not merely as having no defect in Himself, but as knowing no failure in the mission of His existence, and no limit in the resources of His nature.

We may observe that the text does not lead us into regions unknown to human experience. Although there are parts of the psalm which present enormous difficulties to the expositor, this verse is one of those biblical passages which challenge the acceptance of every reader by submitting their declaration to the test of his experience. It is affirmed that Christ is more beautiful, more perfect than the children of men. Every one has in his mind some idea of the nature of beauty as descriptive of human excellence, and carries within himself a secret standard of perfection by which he measures the actual realisations of life. He

has, moreover, within the circle of his knowledge, examples of merit or of greatness which he regards either as models of life or as illustrations of capacity. Whatever be the class or the character admired, these examples serve the purpose of relieving the general incompetency and wickedness of human nature, and are so many prophecies of the future redemption of the race. They invigorate the heart and the hope of the human family.

Of all the educating agencies around us, the most potent is the example of other men. In another man's life, when it is fairly brought before us, we study our own. There will be points where it will diverge from ours; but for the sake of parallel passages, those lines in the career where his experience and ours run on together, even incidents remote from us will gain our attention, and contribute to the influence of the character we are studying.

Let us now consider in what essential features of humanity Christ is fairer or more beautiful than the children of men. With reference to physical beauty, we may say, in passing, that we have no revelation on the subject of the outward form which Jesus presented to the world. In an age when the art of copying the human form had attained a supreme perfection, for we have to-day the accurate lineaments of princes, orators, and teachers who flourished before the Christian era, there was a reason why the world should never possess in the galleries of art the face and form of Him who was conceived by the Holy Ghost. Yet we sympathise with the curiosity that would seek to recover the facial impression of "the temple of His body," and with the genius which reverently consecrates its fancy and devotes its pencil to the attempt of conceiving and rendering a face illumined by the majesty of the Son of God. We

can hardly doubt that the body of Jesus was the most glorious creation of the human form that ever appeared upon earth, though its comeliness was gradually spoiled by labour and sorrow, until the charms that win a vulgar admiration had vanished. The Son of man in conflict, in adversity, and in apparent defeat, with a visage so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men (*Isa. lii. 14*), is discountenanced by taste, and shunned by fashion.

But let us study a nobler beauty than symmetrical loveliness ; and instead of dwelling upon particular graces of beauty, let us examine that which is the source of beauty, a perfect growth from the inner man to the outward : the life as complete in expression as in conception. This is a perfection in which Jesus stands alone. There was in Him an unbroken unity between the inner life and the outward act : except in Christ, such a unity has never been known in human nature. I do not affirm that in a man's career there will not be found instances of it, where the work done is the growth of the purpose conceived. The exploits of a military commander may have little in common with the character of the man ; and the writings of an author will sometimes deceive your judgment if, even in works dedicated to morals, you invariably accept what a man writes as the image or reflection of what a man is. But if there were no such distinction between what a man is and what he does, if the military leader has been made a soldier by patriotism, and rides forth because of *truth* and *meekness* and *righteousness*, his own virtue shaping the purpose of the war, and his noble moderation restraining the fierceness of battle, while the skill of his genius insures the victory of the right, you must acknowledge that this union between the character and the act, as between the root and the branch,

represents the perfection of a military example. The same may be affirmed with even greater emphasis of a writer who, possessing a great soul, with corresponding powers of expression, writes, not because he is moved thereto by the restless felicity of his imagination, or by the enthusiasm of successful research, but from an uncontrollable longing to speak out the truth that is in him, or what he believes to be the truth, if haply his inner history, or portions of it, may increase the stock of human knowledge, guide wandering or bewildered minds into right ways, strengthen the defences of virtue, and discover additional sources of hope and happiness.

Such instances of unity between the inner life and the outer act are so rare that even an approach towards it will distinguish a man from his fellows. The most illustrious name in military annals is Washington, although Alexander, Cæsar, and Napoleon were greater generals. But the American soldier drew his sword to achieve the freedom of his country, and having accomplished that, he put back the weapon into its sheath. And his ambition went no further than the enjoyment, in common with his fellow-citizens, of the independence which he had won.

The reason of the rareness of this kind of virtue is in the process of converting thought and purpose into action. In this process we have to encounter ignorance, frailty, vanity, timidity, and all the subtle combinations of selfishness. And how invincible these are, and how miserably he has failed in contending with them, every man knows, when he compares the idea in his mind with the same idea when it has become an action or a performance. I repeat that in no instance save one has the correspondence been perfectly attained. I am bold to make this statement, because the

most eminent examples of this thorough reality are the first to confess the defeat of their attempts to be true to themselves.

Herein is Jesus fairer than the children of men. The beauty of a perfect growth from the thought to the act belongs to Him and to Him only. It is this feature that gives Him an eminence so distinct and lonely in its loftiness, that not only does no one make the slightest pretension to share it with Him, but it has never occurred to public opinion even to suggest the possibility of a rival. Herein is the secret of that strange ascendancy which He gains even over those who have no sympathy with Him. Personal enemies He has none: no civilised man reviles Him. No learned man would now echo the abuse of Voltaire or the eccentric contumely of Shelley. Those who dispute His claims adore His character. That illustrious sceptic of modern times, John Stuart Mill, may speak for the rest. "Christ," says this author, "was a morally perfect being. Whatever may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left a unique figure, not more unlike all His precursors than all His followers, even those who had the direct benefit of His personal teaching. About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight which must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in His inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius."

It is the simple unity of His character that commands the universal veneration of thinking men. These are the best judges of the difficult process by which the thoughts of the heart are worked out and expressed in the life; and they see in Jesus one who could so control the intervening weak-

nesses of the flesh and the solicitations of self, as to bring out His holiest thoughts and His sublimest purposes, and place them undimmed and unabridged in the deeds of His life. The fact that He could do this, and that no other human being known to history ever did it, gives infinite weight to every word, even the slightest, that fell from His lips, and secures the serious attention of the greatest minds of the world for those mysterious passages in His teaching of which the meaning is doubtful or unknown. What makes this the more remarkable is the fact that there is much which He did not teach. In the study of natural history, in geographical, historical, and commercial knowledge, he left the world pretty much as He found it. These pursuits belong to material progress; and yet how empty their most distinguished triumphs, compared with any of the sayings of Jesus! Grace was poured upon His lips, and therefore "never man spake like this man."

We are proud of our scientific scholars as they tell us of another and another secret which they have won from the mystery of nature. But how do we use the knowledge they give us? how do we employ the new forces of nature which they place at our command? We convert them into weapons and engines that will deal surer, swifter, and wider destruction to our fellow-creatures! As against such a result of scientific culture, consider the policy of Jesus: "The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." What is the worth of a civilisation that makes its intellectual advantages serve the vilest, the most horrible uses to which human power can be degraded? Should not the advancement of intelligence mean the subjugation of passion and the diminishing of the motives and the chances of strife, the cultivation of amity and the security of mutual

safety? Civilisation is a curse if it be a destroyer of mankind and not a saviour! Far better, like the earliest races, to have no other books than the sun and stars, and no other wants than those which an untouched nature can supply, if knowledge, instead of destroying the evils of the world, increases and aggravates them.

But Jesus, if He did not teach science, taught that which sanctifies science, that which makes knowledge a ministering angel instead of a demon of disorder and sorrow. He knew that the value of all other acquisitions depends on the knowledge which a man has of himself. Let him know himself, the moral sickness that lies at the root of his nature, and the disturbance and restraint which this frailty brings upon his intellectual powers; let him know the purpose of his creation, the mission of his life upon the earth, and the destiny of his race, then he may be set free to make what progress he chooses to aspire to. His knowledge will be drawn up above the spot where he has gathered it, purified from surrounding grossness like an exhalation, to fall again in blessings of refreshment and health upon his fellow-men. This is the knowledge which Jesus brought into the world; and He was in His own person the faultless illustration of it. He was a perfect man: not made such by some unknown process, and presented to the world as a phenomenon, a wonder to be stared at: as having no other connexion with history than belonging to its chapter of prodigies, and therefore too remote from the sympathies of common men to exert any influence upon the education of mankind.

The attempt has been made to translate the historic character of Jesus to the cloudland of fiction; to prove that the evangelists are not historians, but idealists; that the

Jesus of the Gospels is the hero of romance, drawn and perfected by the admiring imagination of disciples. But the theory of a fictitious Christ must always break down, for these two reasons :

First, if Christ never existed, then some one has conceived a character to which neither history nor poetry offers a parallel. Nowhere else is there even a measurable inferiority to the altitude of the character of Jesus. Again, if Christ never existed, some one must have delivered the discourses and sayings attributed to Him, must have possessed that wisdom, insight, and power which have made the teaching of Christianity the light of the world, sceptics themselves being judges ; so that it is as difficult to imagine the author of the fictitious Christ as the real Christ.

Secondly, no cloud rests upon the birth of Jesus. He was not born away from us, but in the midst of us. The mystery of His creation is in the background ; but whatever this may be,—whatever the origin of His wisdom, most new and yet most ancient, whatever the nature of that union with unseen attributes to which He ever appealed as the authority of His teaching and the explanation of His power, was not His mother called Mary, and His brethren, James and Joses and Simon and Judas ? and His sisters, were they not all with us ? Those who are driven to question His family reality, because they cannot account for the wonders He is said to have wrought, may with equal consistency doubt all history and all testimony.

But care has been taken that we should know the book of the generation of Jesus Christ the Son of David too well to be moved away from this ground of our faith, *that in all things Christ was made like unto His brethren* (Heb. ii. 17). We see Him grow up

amongst us, familiar with duty and conflict and suffering. There is more sorrow in the world than joy ; more labour than rest ; more loss than gain ; more poverty than plenty ; more censure than applause ; and He chose a career which led Him through a lower sphere of adversity than any human being had ever touched ; insomuch that sorrow is one of the names by which He is known. His life was one conflict : a conflict for the most part within the arena of our common experience ; a conflict with Himself, by which He learned obedience ; “Father, not My will, but Thine, be done” (Luke xxii. 42) ; a conflict with suggestions which have most power over a man when he is alone ; the devil of the wilderness ; a conflict with the steady envy of rivals, with the fluctuating animosity of the public, and with the alienation of friends. There is no terror known to fear, no failure of hope, no pang of anguish, to which Jesus was a stranger. These are the trials in which the mightiest men have no might. It may be the happy lot of certain among us to escape from some of them ; it is the fortune of no one to escape from all ; and it is the fate of all to succumb with more or less humiliation in this universal fight with the flesh and with the mind. But Jesus grappled with the adversaries, the reverses, and the weaknesses of human condition with so absolute a mastery of resistance, that He gives the impression, as you study the darker passages of His life, that He never knew those changes in a struggle when your antagonist and you gain an alternate advantage, and the battle sways to and fro, and victory hangs in a balance. With Him it was an even conquest throughout, yet never achieved by insensibility or stoicism. No human being was ever endowed with a bodily organism so delicate and sensitive ;

in no heart are the emotions so quickly responsive to circumstances of excitement, as they were in the heart of Him who rejoiced with them that rejoiced, and wept with them that wept.

It does not subtract from the worth of this testimony that on two occasions He was smitten by pangs of transcendent pain unknown to human nature. It may be sufficient to observe, first, that these events comprised the *baptism*,<sup>1</sup> to use His most expressive phrase, which He was appointed to undergo. He knew of its approach, calmly foretold it, and as confidently predicted the victorious issue of it. Secondly, that when His temptations and afflictions are understood by us, whenever He appears in a human position, where we can compare Him with the children of men, His words, His acts, His manner, surpass the conduct which we may conceive to be required by that position.

So much for the spotless truthfulness of Christ's nature, for the unrivalled completeness with which that nature was expressed, for the human fellowship of His life and sufferings, and for the unapproachable example of His fortitude and triumph. The beauty of this career consists in its having no flaw: there is nothing missing; there is nothing out of place; there is also perfect harmony of proportion. This last feature is the more extraordinary because He had illimitable endowments. His economy in the use of power is miraculous as the power itself. To recur to a thought which we have suggested before, it is no mean proof of the reality of Christ's history, that the conception of an imaginary Christ is impossible to human genius. The poet might ascribe omnipotence to his hero; but it would never

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 50.

occur to his imagination to make him use it with the temperance, the sedateness, the beneficence, and the humility that always distinguished the miracles of Jesus.

This last remark leads us to consider the dominant spirit of His life. It was not merely the love of truth, of purity, of duty, and of work ; it was love for mankind. It was the labour of His life to seek out and to recover the lost mind of man ; to bring back its dignity, its honour, and its beauty by restoring its union with God. This psalm invokes Him in splendid imagery as a military personage, preparing an expedition for universal conquest : but His enemies were not men, and His weapons were not carnal ; His mighty sword was truth ; His shield meekness ; His girdle righteousness ; His adversary was the devil. We need not define or defend the personality of the devil. It is enough for us to know that Jesus did not contend with imaginary demons, the creatures of a heated temperament, but with veritable spirits of evil. What we have to consider is the condition into which the world has been brought : the palpable evils which are as prevalent to-day as in the time of Christ's personal intercourse with men ; the seeming of truth instead of truth itself ; the tyranny of ambition, assuming the form of the protection of right ; the hollow and dissimulating kindness which rules the courtesy of society ; the colossal frauds which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers ; the villainous hypocrisy that hides itself in the vestments of the temple ; the drunkenness that blasphemes and shames the image of God ; the idolatry that carries the most stupendous of all lies in its right hand ;—these are the enemies which Christ challenged to mortal combat, and not men who are their victims. The sword which He drew when He went forth to

meet them is in His grasp still, and shall never be laid aside until His enemies be made His footstool.

Does not every honest man count the enemies of Christ to be his enemies? There is no dispute as to the evils against which it is necessary to contend; the question is, which is the weapon that gives us the surest hope of overcoming them? Is it not the sword of the Spirit in the hand of Him who is fairer than the children of men? He alone can wrest the sceptre of the world from the sovereignty of error and wickedness; for is it not true that these are most successfully arrested where He is best known? Is not the word of Christ everywhere the death of error, and the redemption of its victims? What other word has been able to rescue the prey from the mighty? In the old civilisations there were thoughtful, earnest, and brave spirits, men who armed themselves with truth and virtue, and contended with the iniquity of the times; but they struck their adversary so feebly that, except for their own record of it, we should never have known that there had been any fight with the world's evil, so serenely progressive was the reign of corruption and darkness. The non-Christian civilisations of the present day are in the East; and there is a host of honest men in India and China, ignorant of Christ, and yet fighting hard against the lying, the dishonesty, the cruelty, and the shocking indulgences of their communities. But they fight without hope, as did their fathers. The pure strains of the Vedas cannot convey purity to the mind; the ethics of Confucius and the rites of Buddha are powerless to elevate the spirit and manners of China. "Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O mighty One, Thy glory and Thy majesty. And in Thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteous-

ness: and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things." Christ is everywhere; filled with ideas of beauty, and with powers of reconstruction; spreading Himself like the morning over the dark places of the world to make all things new; to make the earth reflect His own fairness, to make its habitable parts a meet residence for Himself, and to have His delights with the sons of men.<sup>1</sup> He will make them fair: fair in their spirits, in their families, in their nations. His throne must prosper, because the sceptre of His kingdom is a right sceptre. He calls us to be witnesses of the fact that He finds tumult and He leaves peace; that He finds guilt and shame, and leaves purity and honour; that He finds loss and sorrow, and leaves the wealth and the joy of His own communion; and having beautified our spirits and fellowships and homes, He sends us forth to follow the steps of His laborious and all-conquering love, until the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Prov. viii. 31.



IV

## The Source of Life



## THE SOURCE OF LIFE

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever.  
—HEB. xiii. 8.

THE rarest of spiritual acquisitions is patience under what appears to be an indefinite postponement of hope. This epistle was written to a disheartened Church, and it has proved to God's people a never-failing lamp when the path of their pilgrimage has been overcast by the shadows of discipline. I do not know any period in which there was so imperative a need of the light of this Hebrew epistle as the concluding decade of our nineteenth century. In addition to the ordinary antagonism of unbelief, the natural enmity of the heart which takes the colour of its opposition from the present time, there is just now among Christian people themselves a pervading discouragement; not sufficiently intense or active to provoke any noticeable apostasy from the faith, or to affect the numerical forces of the Church, but enough to subdue the stimulus, the courage, and the energy which are the fruits of a healthy Christian faith. Some are cast down by a fear lest the advancement of science should mean the decadence of faith and the ultimate dethronement of the Scriptures; others are perplexed and saddened because, after all these ages of work and zeal and suffering, the triumph of Christ yet hangs in suspense, the glowing predictions and promise of apostolic hope still live

in the expectations of the faithful, and live nowhere else ; others are sick of the controversies and divisions of the Church ; and many, without any specific ground of uneasiness, imagine that the Christian outlook is a forlorn hope.

There is no symptom so full of danger to the body of Christ as this loss of heart. The writer of our epistle, with masterly skill and a generous experience, prescribed for this sickness ; not merely for that type of the malady which prevailed among the Hebrews of his day, but for every possible form it might afterward assume. What is his remedy ? how did he succeed in arresting the decline that had set in against the number and unity of the Hebrew believers ? how did he save them from being further carried away by the manifold and strange teachings which swept by them like a tempest ? He exhibited the eternity of Christ. It is the first note, and the keynote of the epistle. God has spoken unto us by His Son, *and once for all* (i. 2). All fragments of antecedent oracles find their complete utterance in the last revelation. He teaches these dejected Hebrews to associate with their law, with their ceremonial, with the inspiration of their prophecy, with all the chronicles of their history, a pre-existing Christ : God manifested to the apprehension of men through one mind, in whose image man was created ; for the study of whose nature and in view of whose service the human faculties were constructed.

Admitting the importance of their beloved Judaism, the writer makes it clear to the Hebrews that that importance was conferred by its typical relation to Jesus Christ ; that apart from Him it had no meaning whatever ; that its government and its temple were an historical and ritualistic symbol of the personal work and kingdom of Christ. He argues that the decay of this symbol was indicative not

of failure, but of progress ; that its splendour was always intended to pale and be lost at the rising of the Sun of righteousness, the Light of the world. It follows from this argument, that if the Hebrew Christians were disappointed at the mode of the Messiah's revelation ; if the men at the head of the Christian movement, the methods they adopted for its advancement, the enormous difficulties that lay in their path, and the sufferings brought upon their followers, were altogether contrary to the hopes they had been instructed to cherish, with the result upon themselves of a waning attachment to the Church and a threatened desertion of it, they assumed the absurd position of critics of the ancient ways of God. They might have remembered a terrible rebuke delivered to the critics of God : “ My ways are not your ways, neither are My thoughts your thoughts, saith the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

The writer was anxious that his friends should master this fundamental truth—that the incarnation was not the beginning of the Christ, but the manifestation of the Christ. The humility of His birth, the contraction and obscurity of His ministry, the hostility that embittered His life and apparently impeded His mission, the ignominy that invested His last hours, these were not in any sense contingent upon the motives and circumstances that produced them ; they followed each other in the pre-arranged plan of God's decrees, the humiliations equally with the triumphs. This is exactly expressed by, perhaps, the earliest public utterance of the New Testament Church ; and it affords a remarkable instance of the inspiration that from the beginning attended the councils of its founders. The occasion was the return of Peter and John to their company after their imprisonment and examination by the high priest and the rulers of the

<sup>1</sup> Isa. Iv. 8.

temple. The assembly lifted up the voice of prayer and spiritual exultation ; and these words occur in this remarkable devotion : “ Of a truth, Lord, in this city against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, *to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel foreordained to come to pass* ” (Acts iv. 27, 28). Foreordained yesterday, to come to pass to-day.

It was the impression of belonging to a failing cause that discouraged and weakened the Hebrew Christians. They did not see one Mind pervading and governing all things that concerned the Church ; an invisible hand holding every thread, and making every involution of each thread, like an artist in tapestry, contribute to the pattern of the great idea : no section of the work indicating, to a stranger’s eye, the complete design. The Hebrews saw many minds and many hands at work ; and they judged of the events that transpired, and of the prospects that were unfolding, according to the experience of the moment. The apostle exhorts his converts not to review the diurnal yesterday of man, but to dwell upon the infinite yesterday of Christ ; to let go the perishing institution of the human period, and to take hold of the original covenant of God. He did not embarrass them by speculations on the eternity of the Godhead : he makes the ruling idea intelligible to them by the familiar periods of yesterday and to-day ; and by abstracting from the operation of these periods as affecting Christ the changes which we associate with current years. But he is not satisfied that “ yesterday and to-day ” are expressions that adequately set forth the immutability with which he desires to fill the thoughts of his readers, and he adds the wonderful clause, “ yea and for ever.”

It may assist us here to understand the position of the unchangeable Christ, if we consider it in the light of a contrast : (1) We have a yesterday of many minds. (2) We have a yesterday of one mind.

1. In speaking of a yesterday of many minds, the contrast is in the progressive continuity of work. In man's yesterday there is, in a certain sense, an immortal literature. It accumulates from age to age : the perishable falls off ; the best lives on because of the undying beauty of its form, the genius of its creations, and the wealth of its wisdom ; but it consists of scattered contributions of many minds, and these severally appeal to our admiration ; but there is no subject relating to human life and destiny upon which they speak with one voice ; and on such questions a divided or miscellaneous authority is fatal to human trust. Even in science, while the aim of its labourers is sublime, and the register of their observations an inestimable gain to knowledge, how largely does science consist of theory ; the facts indisputable, the inferences drawn from them, in many cases, mere speculation.

But what have the minds which are at work to-day, in any vocation, saved from their yesterday ? In how many instances is to-day the celebration of yesterday's failure ? In how many instances has there come to-day a new discovery, a new induction, a new economy, which may prove to be the initial force that shall undermine and demolish an institution, a government, a commercial fabric, a system of scientific or ecclesiastical belief, which at present bears every sign of strength and every promise of perpetuity ? I do not despise exertions that end in failure ; I do not laugh at hopes that go out in eclipse. Misfortunes are the discipline of life ; the half of our success is due to the incentives

awakened by failure. The greatness of man is shown by his ability to study failure; he obtains from it a new mastery of his materials, and not infrequently he is able to add to them the lacking conditions of success. Moreover, the seasons of time and the fashions of the day are in a perpetual flux of change; and the necessities of this year will yield their place to the competing requirements of next. This is human life; in the language of the son of Sirach: "Yesterday for me, and to-day for thee."

But what has the yesterday of many minds accomplished? Examine the record which history has preserved; a small fragment of the past; and even this would be reduced to a much narrower compass if divested of the accretions of fable. I am not in sympathy with the philosophic pessimist; but I frankly aver that with no other guides than the passing lights of man's intellect, I have no clue to the mystery of continuous human life. If the pessimist dispute with me the importance and significance of our existence, I find it difficult to resist his position. He sees no purpose in speculations that cannot find a basis of fact, or, at least, of reason. I see none. He sees no hope for the race in the tremendous inequalities of human condition. I see none. He sees that progress in knowledge, in experience, in wealth, and in taste, does not subdue the dominion of passion or abate the insolence of power. I am bound to agree with him. He confesses that there is diffused through mankind an illimitable resource of strength, in understanding, in experience, in sympathy, and in combination; but he maintains that, so far as he can discover, mankind has no goal, that the energies of the race do not point to any intelligible consummation, and that the energies themselves are either latent, and therefore useless in the half-formed

races of the earth, or rendered nugatory in more favoured realms by the mutual suspicion and military lust of governments, and by a mournful lack of honesty, humanity, and purity in the various classes of the population. I confess in all sincerity that I should be an absolute and desperate pessimist if I were not able to look unto Jesus. I lose my despair at the cross ; and this is how I part with it : I see no despair in *Him*, no, not in the sharpest crisis of His agony. Yet if He were not more than man, despair ought to have found in the dying Jesus both a ministry and a victim. Cut off in mid-career, accursed by His nation, and abandoned to His fate by the few who called Him Master, there was nothing wanting to complete all the elements of despair. But Christ was not the martyr of misfortune ; His was not the end of a man swept into the yesterdays of sorrow and failure. His death was the birth of a universal hope ; His resurrection was the inauguration of the reign of that hope. I see Him by His sufferings and death making purification for the sins of the world, and then ascending up *where He was before* (John vi. 62).

2. This brings us to the yesterday of the one Mind. In that yesterday I have not a succession of thoughts thrown up by the ages, of theories projected by the schools and dying with them, of beliefs reflecting in part the natural cravings of the religious instinct, and in part the surroundings in which those cravings grew into form and expression. I have *one Mind*, the earliest thinker of the earliest yesterday, and the latest thinker in the future history of thought : the first-born before the creation (Col. i. 15) ; who saw the beginning of mankind ; who conceived and framed a purpose in regard to the development of mankind ; who has been the leading spirit of every generation, having access to every mind and a

perfect knowledge of every movement of thought; who because He loved us, with a love as yet unexplained, did not allow the dreadful episode of the fall to turn Him aside from the fulfilment of His design, but threw Himself into the disorder and humiliation of that catastrophe, shared its responsibilities and penalties; and by His incarnation, His life, death, and resurrection, restored even to a greater lustre the glory which sin had darkened in the first Paradise. The yesterday of one mind is the yesterday of one connected work acting in unison with all forces and with all events; not the unison of an ever-shifting accommodation, but the harmony produced by an omniscient and almighty control, reconciling all things unto itself, whether they be things in the earth or things in the heavens (Col. i. 20).

Let us then fix our attention upon the one Mind, accomplishing through the ages one purpose, the salvation of our race. The yesterday of that Mind is an infinite past without one break in the operation of its work, without the loss of one incident or one moment in the consciousness and knowledge in which the yesterday is joined to the present of to-day. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day."

I beseech you who, like the Hebrews, are under the discouragement of disappointed expectations, who tremble for the safety of the Bible when the peering eyes of a bold scholarship are looking under the foundations of the Scriptures, accepting what they can make out, and condemning everything they cannot see, because they cannot see it; you who are frightened at the agnostic who proclaims that his mind is too subtle, too critical, and too comprehensive to admit that there can be another and greater mind than his own; you who are concerned to find that the homage of the world is divided between a number of claimants, and

this in the face of an oath alleged to have come from the lips of God Himself, that every knee must bend to the majesty of the Christ: you who are indignant because of the divisions of the Church, and disconcerted because of the slow march of her progress—I beseech you to look away for the moment from a yesterday of many minds, whether they be in the Church or in the world, and to regard only the one Mind, the unchangeable Christ, near to every one of us and present in our assemblies, but infinitely above the range of the infidel shaft: who looks down with serene compassion upon speculations that set at naught His Deity, and with solicitude upon disciples whose attachment to Himself has been shaken by doubt and to whom He addresses that pathetic appeal, Will ye also go away? Look at His yesterday, it has been a silent unfolding of His love; and it is still unfolding.

I have quoted the rebuke of Isaiah : “*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.*” The Epistle to the Hebrews is an exposition of this passage. Let us use it as a key to the interpretation of the work of Christ. The historical past of Christ is a record of human disappointment. The world by its wisdom has never been able to trace Him. The events He framed and brought into occurrence never corresponded with human conjecture. He fulfilled prophecies and answered prayers on grounds altogether outside the experience of mankind. His incarnation was universally expected by the Jewish Church ; but when He appeared, the surroundings of the advent were so adverse to the public expectation, that when He came to His own, His own received Him not. He fulfilled His course, but during that course those who loved and followed Him always misunderstood Him at first ; and the main facts of His mission were never apprehended at all, even by His closest observers,

until He had passed away. The manner of His end was a cruel explosion of the visions of His dearest relatives, His friends, and His apostles. He was accused by the Jew, He was judged by the Roman, and put to death by miscellaneous Gentiles in the service of Rome. Strange union at the Cross! The representatives of the great races were there, looking at Him whom they had pierced ; and through their descendants they shall look at Him again. The Cross is the central attraction of nations. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself" (John xii. 32). It has been said that the Jesus of yesterday is a historic shadow to-day. Does the present position of Christianity support the notion of a Christ paling into shadow ? The Jesus Christ of yesterday is the Jesus Christ of to-day. This is the day of Jesus Christ, and the day of none other. He brings all the past into this day. He foreknew this day ; He has conducted all things with reference to this day ; and as affecting the human race, the labours, the sufferings, the changes, and the errors of this day, He will bend to the furtherance of the work which He has assigned to Himself for this day.

We are speaking of the ways of God foolishly, as if He were a human being. Yet not altogether foolishly ; for the glorious Incarnation brings the Christ within the familiar circle of human limitations and human sympathies. It is the human side of Christ that comes to the relief of our darkness when we are groping our perilous way through some problem of a divine utterance ; when doubt, and mental weakness, and the sin of an irritable impatience, with the many temptations attending them, enslave and paralyse the understanding. Like the prophet Ezekiel, we see in the cloudy and despairing gloom that invests us a likeness

as the appearance of a man (Ezek. i. 26) ; and we hear a voice coming out of the cloud---“*This is My beloved Son, hear Him*” (Mark ix. 7).

Christ is saving the world, but not in our way. He selects instruments that we should never have chosen. He reaches men by processes absolutely inconceivable. His hand is upon the entire race, to lift it up. He has access to the hearts of all men ; and while the methods of His ministry are unknown, the character of that ministry may be inferred from the exquisite words of the author of our epistle, “*He bears gently with the ignorant and the erring.*” He does not restrict His sympathy to those who confess Him ; He offers help to those who are “*out of the way.*” He is infinitely charitable : He extends His sympathetic ministry to societies where preachers are never heard ; to circles where pastors are never admitted. Show Him a heart broken with sorrow ; show Him a mind tortured with doubt ; show Him an opponent whose antagonism falters before the problems which the present day is unfolding ; and without consulting the Churches, He will look at that man who is poor, conscious of the poverty and emptiness of his understanding, and of a contrite spirit (Isa. lxvi. 2), bruised in the fight with passion, or scepticism, or reverse, with all the resources that promised him help exhausted, and that trembleth at His word, not only with an enlightened Christian fear, but with a dread of *wrath to come*, which no reasoning is able to dismiss—He will look toward that man, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite one.



v

## The Reflection of Life



## THE REFLECTION OF LIFE

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,  
and glorify your Father which is in heaven.—MATT. v. 16.

WHAT is called Christian evidence has been in every age an anxious subject with Christian people. The life of our own belief is hidden ; and the evidence of it to ourselves is the demonstration, not of reason, but of an impression wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. There is, however, an argument for the Christian faith which appeals to them that are without. It is to this outside argument that I refer. The Church of Christ holds it under great responsibility. It is not the same in every age ; it changes with the requirements of the times ; and the Author of our faith has provided for every era a corresponding class of evidence. It is true that the cardinal revelations and facts upon which the faith rests are unchanged throughout all ages ; but they vary in the conspicuousness and cogency of their proofs. I believe God has reserved for these last times the crowning argument of the new creature, or the new character which is begotten of faith in Christ. This demonstration is unlike others, inasmuch as it has not been entrusted to a particular order of apologists. It has been placed by an equal appointment in the charge of every disciple. It comes not from the pulpit, or from the council, or from the treatise, but from the life ; and the argument is rendered conclusive

from the fact that the character which springs from fellowship with Christ is purer in conduct, loftier in aim, and more fruitful in beneficence, than that which is produced under any other system of morals or belief.

The study of other religions has been rapidly advanced during recent years. We have not only obtained access to such literature as they possess, but there are now large opportunities of visiting the nations that inherit them. We have penetrated the high places of the faiths of the world, and observed what may be considered as the authorities of their doctrines and the models of their best results. We have examined the institutions which have grown out of their traditions, we have mingled with the people to whose life they have given inspiration and form. We might accuse them of a lack of historic evidence ; we might assail their violations of nature, and the barrenness and failure of their work ; we might show that they have depressed and not exalted humanity : but their most conspicuous defect is the weakness of their ethical element. They cannot produce a new creature, a new character. Their ceremonial abounds in symbols of holiness, parts of their literature are distinguished by noble meditations and high devotional moods ; but they cannot build a holy character : they can cover with form and semblance, but they seem unable to change the motives and the current of life ; they cannot command the power to bring into practical expression even the moderate aspirations of natural piety ; in that conflict between the good and the evil which is waged in every man's breast, their record is uniform defeat. So much for the non-Christian faiths of the world in their relation to the new creature or character.

There is a philosophy which agrees with us in con-

demning the feebleness and barrenness of these non-Christian religions ; but it includes within this judgment the Christian faith itself. It confesses that Christianity is a more enlightened and refined superstition ; but that none the less it has no foundation in fact. It has done excellent work for the human race as a passing instrument of education ; but in the march of thought and of exact knowledge it is destined to fall into the rear. It acknowledges, moreover, that a new creature is wanted ; a new earth wherein shall dwell righteousness. It professes to be as impatient as we are of error, licentiousness, and inhumanity ; but it maintains that nature will evolve her own changes, and that she alone has the right and the power of the proclamation, “Behold, I make all things new” (*Rev. xxi. 5*).

If we demand that philosophy shall furnish us with an example of her inspiration and skill in changing a man’s life, and in framing a new character, we are referred to men who have attained an unassailable virtue, albeit they deny the authority of the Christian faith. But I decline altogether to accept the character of these persons as the product of their anti-Christian philosophy. They had a Christian parentage ; in all probability they drew their earliest nurture from the milk of the Christian word. The restraints that invested their passions, the lessons that determined, and the examples that encouraged and fortified their habits, were supplied from the great storehouse of the Christian Church ; and when at a subsequent period they renounced these authorities, and walked into the kingdom of science, they took their Christian habits with them, since these had become part of themselves ; and now these beautiful fruits of the Christian life are affirmed to be the growth of their new principles.

To make our statement under this head complete, we must add that where the Christian faith has left little or no trace of itself upon the mind, and the atheistic doctrine has had most to do in fashioning the man, the result has not been encouraging. We should hardly be inaccurate if we were to say that in that very proportion has the moral standard of the life fallen. These facts and our observations upon them lead us to the following conclusion :

*First*, that moral purity and practical righteousness are the proposed results of all teaching.

*Secondly*, that these virtues are not only found in their highest form in the doctrines and examples of the Christian Church, but, so far as we know, are not produced by the operation of any other teaching.

Here we take our stand ; let us boldly maintain it. Holiness is the exclusive heritage of the people of God. Our earliest historic symbol was separation : "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (Isa. lii. 11 ; 2 Cor. vi. 17). Not the isolation of selfishness, of timidity, of race pride ; for if these vices and false sentiments abounded, as unhappily they did, in the divine kingdom of Israel, they were condemned by the construction and purpose of that government, and rebuked in all the continuous teaching of the Mosaic prophets. At the time when they were a severed nation, they were the servants of all nations. St. Paul in a famous passage has condensed with much force of expression the relations and functions of Israel in respect of the human race : "My kinsmen according to the flesh : who are Israelites ; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises ; whose are the fathers,

and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever " (Rom. ix. 3, 4).

Among the Jews the type of separation was not restricted to race ; it runs through all the divisions of their temple and family ceremonial : not capriciously, to make them unlike every other people, but systematically, to foreshadow the universal holiness of the Church of the Messiah. Every member of the Jewish congregation was declared holy by separation, every work contemplated was supposed to have upon it the sacrificial blood of purification, every house was a miniature sanctuary, every business was a religious service, every recreation was a divine benediction : there was the mark, the brand of dedication and holiness on all the energies, the combinations, the orders, and the personalities of life. The command which comprehended all laws pertaining to conduct and education was this : "Ye shall be holy ; for I am holy " (1 Pet. i. 16). Now, as our earliest historic symbol was national and ceremonial separation, the development of that symbol is, in the language of St. Peter, " An elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that they may show forth the excellences of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light " (1 Pet. ii. 9). And the duty of this elect race, this holy nation, this people made luminous by the presence of Christ is defined by Christ Himself in words to which the present age gives a new meaning : " Ye are the light of the world." " Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in heaven." Light in these passages means holiness. That part of holiness which is seen by men is " good works," and the effect of good works is the refutation of the atheism of men : they who lived without God, who did not like to retain Him in their knowledge,

and not only became insensible, but sceptical of His existence ; they to whom the framework of the universe delivered an inconclusive testimony for God, whom the order of His providence failed to impress, are convinced by the holiness of His people.

The fact is that, as a rule, atheism is not the conclusion of reasoning, it is unreasoning godlessness ; it is not serious, it follows no aim ; it springs from no living organism ; its works are dead. In the Bible it is always represented under images of negation, chaos, night, death, and corruption. When a Christian life shines in this region, it is made brilliant by reason of the surrounding darkness ; all eyes are drawn to watch it ; wickedness shrinks from it, and the ideas and purposes of evil fly away from its rebuke like birds of ill omen. Such a life proclaims at once a heavenly source. Everything from it, and about it, is new. It is felt by all that the man who is animated by it is a new creature, that he walks in newness of life. If the inspection goes further, and the deeds that shine forth and attract the public gaze are traced to their source, so far as the inexperienced eye can trace them, and it is seen that the motives which inspire them and the aims they seek to realise, are not the characteristics of a sect, the monstrous product of anomalous conditions, but are related to humanity itself, and would, if diffused, make a new earth, men would look up for an explanation of it ; for, not finding it in themselves, or the promise of it in the wisdom of their teachers, or examples of it in the records of their history, they would be compelled to ascribe it to the divinity above us, they would glorify our Father who is in heaven.

This argument for God and the revelations of God is entrusted to us. Infidelity can resist everything but a holy

life. Take the effect of the new life upon any doctrine : let me select one, the doctrine of immortality. As received by the world, this grandest distinction of our nature is not in any sense an accepted doctrine, it is a speculation in philosophy, a dream in poetry, a decoration in rhetoric. Outside the Christian revelation it has not advanced by one degree of clearness or definiteness beyond the point where the pagan thinkers left it. With us it is an experimental verity ; it was brought to light by the risen Jesus, and the followers of Jesus are the children of immortality. Christianity stands out from all other philosophies and faiths by its demonstration of an unseen community ; an unseen kingdom governed by One who was dead and is alive again for evermore (Rev. i. 18). The unseen life is our hope of glory. If there be no unseen life, we are impostors, and our religion is a child's fabric standing for awhile on the sand. But, thank God ! we have not followed a cunningly devised fable. Then let us say so. Let us maintain by a consistent expression that this is not our rest. "They that say such things," says the author of the Hebrews (xi. 14), "declare plainly that they seek a country." Let us declare it plainly ; not in speech, because the world will not regard our speech, but in habits, tastes, and plans of life. If we are pilgrims, let us affirm it by moving on : if we are sojourners in the world, let us not become naturalised citizens of the world ; let our citizenship be in heaven, whence we look for the Saviour. Our testimony is worthless if we favour the impression that we are laying up for ourselves treasures on the earth, that by taking deep root in the pursuits, in the gains, in the pleasures, and in the distinctions of the world, we are looking for no substance elsewhere. Men will reason, and naturally reason, that we

do not believe what we avow ; that the hope of immortality is a mask intended to deceive others, or, to put it more charitably, by which we deceive ourselves.

Let that majestic fact, our immortality in Christ, shine out with convincing lustre in the unworldliness of our spirit, in the heavenliness of our conversation, in the largeness and elevation of our transactions, in the god-like beneficence of our life. Let us imitate Him who lived at the same moment in heaven and upon earth, drawing His inspiration from His own skies, but never lost in it : wakeful to the duties, the cares, and the sorrows of the earth, but only to lift earth nearer heaven ; and men will take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, that we are risen with Christ, and seek those things which are above. So shall we bring out man's immortality from speculation and superstition into fact, and the much assurance which acknowledges fact.

To sum up all, *let us agree to be holy*. I do not mean, let us agree about holiness, let us bring our views on the subject into perfect harmony. I do not ask for a theological formula to which we can all subscribe ; let our teachers discuss and defend holiness in their treatises, let our ecclesiastical rulers fix it in their catechisms. We represent here the people of the Churches. Agreement on theological definitions is not our calling just now. Holiness *is* our calling. Let us agree to be holy. Let me repeat the command of the heavenly Father to His children : “Ye shall be holy ; for I am holy.” This must surely mean that the provisions of holiness are within our reach ; and they are brought near to us, not by a coincidence of opinion as to the time, the manner, the limit, or other circumstances under which they are dispensed, but by hungering and thirsting for them. It is longing after a blessing that makes

it ours; and the blessing which at this time we most ardently wish to possess is a complete salvation. We want to obtain the utmost which the gospel can do for us. We open our minds and our life to receive the perfect result, so far as we can know it, of the vicarious work and intercession of Jesus. We want to know how much of that which is laid up for us we can receive now. We want to be filled with the Holy Ghost: to return to the battle, from this brief rest, abler soldiers of Jesus Christ. Our Captain alone can secure us against the mistakes which have led to our past defeats. We want more power for God over ourselves, over our families, and over the instruments with which we work.

What is to prevent this fulness of blessing coming upon us? Not the errors that may distort our views; not the infirmities that beset our petitions. Our Father forgives all these at once. He looks at our needs and the sincerity and importunity with which we urge them. I can conceive of but one impediment: a qualified consecration. If we are not whole-hearted in this business, this service has no blessing for us. But if with our prayers we give ourselves, if nothing is kept back, if, having made our sacrifice, we can truthfully say, Everything is gone! if thus we prove Him, He will open the windows of heaven and pour us out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it (Mal. iii. 10).

Those among us who are struggling with a divided choice, a divided worship, who long to be at liberty from the distractions of inner idolatry, let them plead the promise: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you" (Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26). May we not expect

this blessing now? Is not the beatitude intended for the present hour? “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God”: not merely the future beholding of His glory, but the present apprehension of Himself in His truth, in the operations of His providence, in the conflict of His Spirit with men, and in the signs of the second coming of His Son. We desire to see God in these manifestations, to see men as He sees them, to love them as He loves them, to love them in His light. As the offspring of His adopting love we want a child’s testimony, which is the Father’s image. We want a conspicuous righteousness, that we may turn many to righteousness.

If we are found lamenting the prevalence of scepticism, let each one ask himself, How much have I contributed to it?—perhaps by a profession of the faith unsupported by consistent practice; by words and symbols of seriousness without a serious behaviour; by a loose, an indecisive morality in business and in pleasure; by wearing the brand of a religion whose essence is self-denial, and denying ourselves of nothing; by permitting our children to marry into worldly circles, and mingling their fashions and recreations with ours, until the line that divides Christ and Belial is indistinguishable; by living in the midst of ignorance and wickedness, of want and despair, and practically indifferent to the piercing calls for Christian work. There is probably no one of us against whom some accusation of unfaithfulness might not be cited; and we are not here merely to expatiate on our privileges, but to confess our sins. The mercy-seat with its blood of sprinkling is brought down into the sanctuary of each heart; and I invite all the disciples of the Master to join me in that exquisitely appropriate and comprehensive petition: “Almighty God,

unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid ; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy holy name ; through Christ our Lord. Amen."



VI

## The Walk of Life



## THE WALK OF LIFE

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord.—COL. i. 10.

THESE remarkable words present the subject of a prayer offered by St. Paul and his colleague Timothy on behalf of their Colossian friends : “ We do not cease to pray for you, . . . that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing ”—in everything pleasing the Lord. The clause, *worthy of the Lord*, contains a principle which is well expressed in the French phrase, *esprit de corps*. It represents a spirit which keeps together a party, a clan, an army. Sometimes it derives its inspiration from a person who is the head of the confederacy ; sometimes from an institution whose principles and fame it is the aim of the members to defend ; sometimes from both united, where the person and the institution stand related to each other as founder and organisation. There is no stronger principle in human life, as there is none which, under wise direction, so quickly ennobles the personal character of men and so richly benefits human society.

Its operation upon the individual man connects him with other men. He puts out of sight personal interests and mere selfish aims ; surrendering his own standard, he takes his pattern either from the example of a leader or from the

ideal of an association. For if there be no leader to embody in himself the doctrines of his party, the members of that party will deduce from those doctrines a code of laws which will take the place of a leader. In either case the standard of the many will surpass the aim and goal of the individual ; and to reach the standard of the many and to maintain it, each member, animated by the presence of his fellow, will be provoked to exertions and will accomplish deeds infinitely beyond the single, the unconnected mind. When a man sacrifices his selfishness as an oblation to his party, he obtains a new spirit ; every attribute he possesses receives a double portion of power, his very frailties become faculties of strength. He lives to be worthy of some one or of something greater than himself.

The operation of this principle upon society makes a number of men act together as one man ; and human nature is exhibited not in the isolated energies and aims of a single mind, but in the joint action of many minds. Each man's labour is the constituent element of the united work ; each man's suffering is, in consciousness and in result, merged in the conflict of the mass ; each man's success is his contribution to the advancement and honour of the concerted enterprise. Here is the secret force of human greatness ; dissimilar from the mass power of certain genera of the lower animals, the ant, for instance, and the bee, inasmuch as human associations are voluntary, and human schemes of work grow into maturity by the slow stages of experiment.

St. Paul applies this principle to our Christian position in the following statement : " We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another " (Rom. xii. 5) ; and he expands it with uncommon beauty in another epistle : " Whether one member suffer, all the members

suffer with it ; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. xii. 26). The vital intimacy of our union with Christ is described in this passage with equal felicity and truth. He has attracted our spirits to Himself by His kingly authority as our God incarnate, by His love and personal sympathy as our universal Redeemer, by the luminous words which like so many lamps He has placed along the valley of human existence, bringing life and immortality to light, and by impressing His fellowship upon the individual consciousness of His followers. These are the cords that bind us to Him, authority, sympathy, revelation, and personal recognition. The text insists upon a *walk* which shall be worthy of Him. There is a meaning at the root of the word here rendered *worthy* which it may be useful to note : it means that which draws the balance, which makes the scales weigh down ; and thence it comes to signify of equal *worth* or *value* : it is worth so much ; that is, it is worthy to be weighed against so much. In this sense St. Paul uses it in a familiar passage : "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be weighed against, to be compared with, the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. viii. 18). The moral application of the word brings out the relation of worthiness of reward or punishment : "They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy" (Rev. iii. 4). "Thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy" (Rev. xvi. 6). Then by implication we come to the idea of suitableness : one thing answering to another, corresponding with it: "Bring forth fruit worthy, meet, proper to repentance." Here we have in this one word, *worthy*, the elements of equal weight, of merit, and of suitableness. To appreciate the force of the expression, "*that ye walk worthy of the Lord*," we must have these three elements

severally in our mind during this discussion. I know it is impossible to admit the practical application of the first thought, weighing ourselves against the Lord Jesus, putting ourselves into the opposite scale, as if to draw down the balance of infinite excellence. But the recollection that such an idea is to be found in this word, that the word is instinct with it, will make us continually aware of the enormous significance of our relation to Christ as disciples, imitators, representatives, friends, brothers.

Having looked at the root of the word, let me cite the several Scriptures in which it is found in a relation similar to the example of the text, as marking the standard of *walking* or *conduct*. In the fourth chapter of Ephesians and the first verse, St. Paul writes : “*I beseech you to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called*” : let the spirit and expression of your life be in harmony with the purpose of your election. In his Epistle to the Philippians, chap. i. ver. 27, there is a similar exhortation : “*Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.*” The gospel of Christ is supposed to have changed your manner of life. Your manner of life, therefore, is the announced result of the gospel, which will be illustrated or obscured, honoured or humbled, as your conduct happens to correspond with it or to falsify it. You are charged with the reputation of the gospel. My last quotation shall be given from the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, chap. ii. vers. 11 and 12 : “*Ye know how we dealt with each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, and encouraging you, and testifying, to the end that ye should walk worthy of God, who calleth you into His own kingdom and glory.*” I do not know a more touching example than this passage affords of the intense solicitude of St. Paul regarding the walk of his converts,

that that walk should exhibit the rank of the sons of God and the princes of heaven. As the father of a noble house explains to his own little children the rank in which they are born and the conduct befitting their rank,—that their language, their manners, their attire, their companions, their education, and their pursuits, must be suitable to the splendour of their station,—so the apostle presented to the wondering eyes of his new-born Gentile children the glories and responsibilities of the royal home into which the Spirit of adoption had introduced them. And St. Peter also, in almost parallel lines, “*As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy*” (1 Pet. i. 14–16).

These Scriptures and the reflections they suggest enable us to lay down this proposition :

A walk which shall be worthy of the Lord must be based upon close and universal sympathy with the Lord. We must be joined to the Lord in one Spirit. As the members of the body are connected by one system of nerves, by one source of emotion, by one controlling will, we must be so related to Christ as to be within and part of the system of His sufferings, His joys, His pursuits, and His will : “*That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings*” (Phil. iii. 10). Presuming that this union is established, let our walk correspond therewith,

1. As it respects the profession of our faith in the teaching of Christ. We assume the designation of Christians because we accept, or profess to accept, the doctrines of the great Teacher. It is not enough that we be admirers of the general character of Jesus ; that we participate in the

public wonder of His success as the founder of a faith ; that we regard Christianity as one of the regenerating forces of the world, which it is the duty of every philanthropist to encourage : we not only subscribe to the *bona fides* of His character, but to the authority of His revelations, to the infallibility of His personal wisdom, and to the indisputable conclusiveness of His commands. If His followers had not been cemented in their allegiance to these, there would have been no Church, no confession of faith : there might have been a school of admirers, a society of critics, perhaps a sect of impracticable mystics ; but no community drawn and bound together by one Lord in personal fellowship with each member, by one faith, the sole condition and ground of every believer's salvation, and by one baptism, the covenant symbol and proclamation of the vital and organic union of the body : there would have been no persecution by the world to repress the activities of testimony and aggression, no heroic defence of the truth, no army of martyrs.

If we loosen our hold of the doctrines of the New Testament, the world will not lift a finger against us, we shall make no noise ; but we shall make no converts. To separate Christ from the miracle of His advent, from the atonement of His cross, and from the fact of His resurrection, is to ignore His historic position, and to relegate the Redeemer to the fable world of genius. There can be no love for such a Christ as this ; when you take the historic fibre from a personality, there is no strength in the character to create more than the sentiment of literary admiration. There can be no walk, no conduct, worthy of the Lord which is not founded upon the objective reality of the Lord's teaching.

If you desire to walk worthy of the Lord, let me advise

you to prove yourselves worthy of the doctrines you profess to believe ; that is, to hold them consistently in proportion to your knowledge and conviction of them. I will venture to affirm that of the perils which just now threaten the Church, the gravest, in all respects, is the lack of this becoming support of the faith which we profess. If you think you hold it, and desire to be known as Christians because you hold it, show yourselves worthy of it. Take care that it be not a mere notion embodied in a ceremony, and adopted as a fashion which it would be considered inconvenient to disavow. If you believe that the teaching of Jesus has cast a ray of light across the border of mortality, and discovered in the open future a world and a place for you, let it be seen in your ways, both privately and publicly, that you confess yourselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth : make it manifest that you who say such things are seeking a fatherland of your own, a better country, that is, a heavenly (Heb. xi. 13-15). Provoke not the ridicule and satire of observers, and the shame of those who profess the same faith, by talking of heaven and building your nest upon the earth ; by showing all diligence in strengthening your hold upon the means, the enjoyments, the securities of the mortal state, and no diligence in making sure your election to the immortal state. It is far more honourable to be a consistent unbeliever who makes the best of the only world he knows, than, with your plans, your hopes, and your affections rooted and grounded in the earth, to affect the style of a pilgrim, and the language of restlessness and progress. It is this unconscious mockery which discredits and humbles the Christian religion far more effectually than the suggestions of scepticism, the arguments of infidelity, or the defiance of impiety. Let

me appeal to your sentiment of honour, the sentiment that shrinks from a lie, which is impatient of disguise, which never feels at home on the stage, or wherever the double is assumed ; let me ask that your Christian profession shall be, so far as it goes, both the meaning and the illustration of your life.

2. Let this walk agree with our union with Jesus as it respects our sympathy with His person and work. We are believers, but much more than believers. We are in living union with the person of Jesus. The walk must be worthy not only of the doctrines, but of Him who revealed them. To be worthy of a doctrine is to believe it, to practise it, to propagate it, and to contend for it. To be worthy of the Master who teaches the doctrine is to be His fellow in teaching it, His second self in jealousy for its success and defence, the companion of His mind in sharing the burdens of its ministry, His imitator in copying the spirit and methods of His work, His proxy to be in the stead of His visible presence, to live in Him, to study His inner self, to master the secret wish or the avowed purpose of His life ; and, having done this, to be His hand, His tongue, His foot, to promote the gratification of that wish or the progress of that purpose.

It is rare indeed that the head of any school of thought or of work, or the sovereign of any realm, can make the union of a subordinate approach this identity of mind, this absolute subjection of will ; but in our relation to Christ, it is carried to the utmost possibility of being. It must be borne in mind that He to whom our spirits are joined is not only the Master or teacher of our doctrines and the founder of our community, but the positive inventor and original of our faculties. He who said, “I will draw

all men unto Myself" (John xii. 32), is the fountain from whom all men proceeded ; and when He joins their powers to His, the junction becomes assimilation. If you think the statement an exaggeration, let me invite you to study this passage from the prayer of our Redeemer on behalf of His disciples : "*The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given unto them ; that they may be one even as we are one ; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one*" (John xvii. 22, 23).

Take as an example of the vitality of our union the sympathy which we express with the event of the crucifixion : it is not a commemorative sympathy which kindles at the anniversary of a great historic event. As a local catastrophe it happened once ; but the death of Christ as a sin-offering for man is an event which is drawn out from generation to generation ; it is always as if it took place yesterday : it will be recent in perpetuity until the last man is saved. It is not meant that the sacrifice of Christ is not complete in itself, that it needs the supplement of sacramental celebration incessantly renewed ; but that its operation in the world is ever new, and is the redeeming power of every succeeding age. Every incident in the Saviour's passion, from the baptism of Gethsemane to the last anguish of the cross, is invested with the freshness and power of a present circumstance ; our glorified Christ dies now in the proclamation of the cross, revives now in the attestation of the resurrection, saves now when a despairing sinner asks to be remembered in His kingdom.

Our preaching of the cross is not a passion play to move spectators and hearers by the fleeting pathos of a tragedy ; it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth : and Christ Himself being with us and in us when

we testify the virtue of His death, helping the mouth to declare it and the ear to receive it, and finding in the salvation it conveys the recompense of the travail of His soul, we are identified with Him in all the variations of His work and His advancement, in the holy shame of the cross and in the triumph of Pentecost. We contribute nothing essential to either event; the suffering and the glory are His: but that disciple who does not weep and work and rejoice with Him knows nothing of walking worthy of the Lord; that disciple who is not with the Master in the conflict now waging between the divine sovereignties of truth and love and the principalities of darkness and iniquity, is not a member of the invisible Church and body of Christ, has neither part nor lot in the matter. Brethren, let us share the enterprise of the Prince of peace with a new jealousy. He is saving the world, let us save the world with Him. We cannot compute the rate of His advancement: we can only be certain of His ultimate triumph. But the process of victory is conflict. His gospel is now pushing its way through the hostility of unrighteousness and unbelief, and over the wastes of human ignorance. His name and His word are assailed on all sides and with every species of weapon. Let us walk worthy of the Lord by lifting the standard of the cross; by defending the historic reality of Him who was slain upon it; by affirming the credentials of His mission, and eminently the miracle of His resurrection: let us gladly wear His reproach, never shrinking from an open avowal of our attachment to His cause. "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life*" (Rev. ii. 10).

And let us be like Him as well as work with Him. Let us remember our rank; "*They are not of the world, even as*

*I am not of the world.*" When the Father lifted us into the relation of children in His household, and brothers and sisters of His Christ, joint-heirs with Him of an eternal inheritance, He endowed us with the power of a behaviour suitable to this rank, in order that our holy childhood should not be an empty title, but possess those heavenly dispositions and that princely bearing befitting the family of God. But, although grace has made us members of the same body, children of the same household, we scarcely as yet understand our place. Even the titles of our rank are so many grand sounds, the meaning of which has scarcely dawned upon our apprehension. And although the new nature has followed the new rank, it has not yet destroyed the old. At present the old and the new are each distinct to our consciousness : happy for us if we can perceive that the new is gradually overlaying and mastering the old. Meantime the new life makes us more keenly observant of the old nature that yet remains ; we are shocked by contrasts within ourselves between the desires of the flesh and the aspirations of the spirit ; our efforts to cherish and encourage and build up the heavenly nature are stubbornly resisted. But He who has begun the new creation in us will yet rest in the finishing of His work (Rev. xxi. 5).



VII

The Fight of Life



## THE FIGHT OF LIFE

Fight the good fight of faith.—1 TIM. vi. 12.

WE shall have no difficulty in affixing a sufficiently exact meaning to the principal word of this text, *fight*. All words of this class are born of the same idea, that of resistance, both active and passive. It comprehends battling with an adversary, contending for a prize, labouring against obstacles that lie in the path of an expedition ; and the spirit of the passage will be preserved if we make the word to mean sometimes one of these modes of resistance and sometimes another.

The unity of the idea that lies at the root of the word *faith* will admit of a similar range of application. We may accept it to mean our persuasion of a doctrine, or the doctrine of which we are persuaded. Anything relating to the difficulties which affect our persuasion of Christian doctrine, whether it concerns the process of this persuasion in our own mind, or our maintenance of it when we are persuaded, belongs to the fight of faith ; anything belonging to the subject-matter of what we are invited to believe, the evidences which prove it, the sources whence these evidences are drawn, and the results of the whole upon our convictions and character, belongs to the faith for which we fight.

To those who object that Christian doctrine is hard

to believe, and hard to continue believing, we reply that in the nature of things faith must be a difficult attainment; otherwise it would not be faith. If, instead of being invited to believe the testimony of a miracle, we saw the miracle itself, and were accustomed to see it, it would cease to be a miracle, and the state of mind awakened by it would cease to be faith. The old demand of unbelief, which is also its modern demand, Show us a sign from heaven, is unreasonable, and in most instances insincere. It is unreasonable, because supposing the sign were granted, it would immediately pass into the region of testimony and become a reported sign; and the world in regard to the evidence of miracle would be just where it is now, and require another sign. Those who saw it not must depend upon the attestation of eye-witnesses, and when the eye-witnesses die, upon the depositions of record or Scripture. It is not a cry in the interest of truth, but in the interest of self. ‘Show me a sign; I do not wish to undertake the painful process of examining the subject; I am not equal to the patience of enquiry, to the irritable fluctuations of doubt, to the discipline of labour. Convince me at once by a sign which shall make questioning superfluous.’

But this temper is not only selfish, it is irrational. For the sign that would make you a convert would not necessarily produce faith in me: it might confirm my unbelief; in any case, if it relieved you of the toil of thinking, it might not relieve me. Therefore, Show me a sign from heaven, means, Let every one have a sign suited to the features and education of his mind. I will select an unbeliever whose learning, experience, and character have made him a formidable adversary of the Christian religion. I will assume that

every additional evidence he demands is supplied ; that the chronology of the Scriptures is rectified to his satisfaction ; that the discrepancies of the Gospels are harmonised, and the historic reality of Jesus verified by every proof which he thinks the present argument requires ; that, in brief, the entire system of Christian evidence is without a flaw : and I will ask you whether the Christian Scriptures so revised, the Christian argument so supplemented and perfected, would be more intelligible to non-Christian races than the Bible is to-day ? Nay, to say nothing about peoples of other faiths, would the supposed revision be perceptible to the masses of our own country ? would there be less doubt, and more conversions than we can now report through what you are pleased to call an imperfect revelation ?

But why should it be alleged as a charge against the Christian faith that it must be won by fighting, or by painful resistance ? There is no excellence that comes readily to our hand ; it is the fruit of thought, of labour, and of patience. This certainly applies to that treasure which all agree to designate the rarest possession of the mind, truth. We have entered into the labours of other men, and are spendthrifts of a wealth which long-continued diligence and carefulness acquired and hoarded for us. It is well to remember that every grain of it was a conquest over prejudice and ease, and that some of the more precious of its gains cost the toil and the suffering of many lives. How slowly, and after ages of work and intermittent failure, did men come to believe what are now accepted as the rudiments, almost the axioms, of social life ! Not only does no one question them, but we enjoy them with as much thoughtlessness as if they were natural impressions, and had cost us nothing. And where should we now be if the whole realm

of truth were mastered, and there were no more intellectual kingdoms to subdue? Our condition would be pitiable indeed. Men are pronounced great by victory; but they have been made great by agony. The divine Framer of the mind, in narrowing by a strait gate the passage that leads to faith, has not imposed an arbitrary law whose rigour is a new experience to men, but a very old law, that what is worth having shall be taken by force.

The text teaches us, in the first place, that the fight of faith is not essentially a struggle with *testimony*. If it were, there would have been little conflict when faith began its work. Christianity was cradled in a miracle, and the first believers lived in palpable, in material relationship with the supernatural. Testimony at that time lived upon the revelations of yesterday and did not need to be fought for, until the advancement of time had so far thrown it into the rear as to obscure or disorder the links of its chain. But strife was associated with faith from the beginning, under the very shadow and reign of Christ's miraculous power. Men did not believe the more because testimony was recent, direct, and irresistible. If conversion is now surrounded and impeded by difficult conditions, it was agony then. The earliest disciples are represented as winning their faith by conflict and preserving it by vigilance. They were crowned because they overcame; and military valour, weapons, and discipline are freely borrowed to depict the assailants and perils of the belief of primitive times (Eph. vi. 10, etc.). Let us therefore hear no more of the present imperfect state of its historic evidence being a difficulty in the way of the Christian faith, and of conversion and discipleship.

Where does the struggle lie? Where it did, and where it ever will lie: in the conquest of self for God: which is,

*first*, to accept faith in God as the highest condition on earth of a human being ; and, *secondly*, to subordinate in the pursuit of it, either for use or temporary subjugation, every faculty, every passion, and every circumstance in life.

In regard to the first, we may say at once that faith will never become theirs who place it lower than the highest state of man. If it be objected that in the present condition of the human mind it is scarcely fair to insist upon a pre-judgment on the nature of Christian faith before we begin to examine its claims, we may answer that the pre-judgment upon which we insist affects not the premises of the examination, but the motive of it. We do not say, before you begin to investigate the subject, you shall assume that Christianity is true ; but you shall assume that if faith in God be a reality, the realisation of that faith is the highest conceivable state of man. In the midst of our frailty and the mortifying boundaries both of life and of mind, entailing upon all, even upon the most fortunate, the consciousness of perpetual failure in seeking to attain one's hopes, we have the glimpses if not the definite prospect of a better life. We are able to imagine a life, which, could it be attained, would be perfect ; and that perfect life which we sometimes shape to ourselves is never the victory of unbridled passion and a prolonged triumph of self. No intelligent man thirsts for a heaven like this.

That to which a man would wish to give immortality is the consciousness of mental growth, a rare and beautiful pleasure, and the joys of friendship, when the union of two minds is based upon love and identity of pursuit, cherished by mutual help and gladdened by mutual discoveries of excellence, as the hidden graces and worth of character come more and more into light. These are what no honest and

thoughtful man, let him belong to what nation he may, and profess what belief he may, would willingly let die. This has been the heaven of rational men in all countries where there has been no surer light than human reason. It has engaged the speculations of the deepest thinkers and inspired the best literature.

If, then, the consciousness of mental growth and the joys of a noble friendship are states of life which every educated mind conceives to be the sublimest happiness of which we are capable, where is the difficulty in assuming that faith in God, supposing that such a thing exists, is the highest state of man? For mental growth and the joys of friendship are the fruit of the fellowship of man with man, of mind with mind. But we are supposing the fellowship of man with God, the Creator of mind; who planned its personality, with the faculties, passions, and conscience which constitute that personality; who framed for its habitation a body; who made the outside world and ordained that wonderful system of impressions by which the spirit of a man is connected with external nature and educated by it.

When faith unites me with God, there are two sources of growth: first, the natural effect upon my own mind of contemplating that which is infinitely higher than myself. By striving to know one who is too great for me ever to know perfectly, but whom I am invited and encouraged to know by the conscious progress I make in this knowledge, my faculties are in the condition of a constant and healthy strain, and necessarily expand. The second source of growth is not so easily defined, but, as a fact, it is equally distinct; there is the positive help communicated by the greater mind to the lesser. St. Paul expresses this truth perfectly: "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him"

(Rom. x. 12). That is, if any man, be he Jew or Gentile, place himself by meditation and prayer under the sympathetic notice of the divine presence, there will flow out to him immeasurable streams of sympathy, of love, and of revelation that shall act upon his strained faculties and upon his growth as a flood at the roots of a parched tree.

As for that other element of happiness, the joys of a noble friendship, faith in God means friendship with God ; and whatever be the desirable aspects of human friendships, whether they take their origin in family life from the parent and the maturer offspring, or from the elder and the younger brother ; or whether the affinities of taste, likeness, or pursuit, draw two minds together, the purest conditions and the noblest features of human intercourse are comprehended in indefinite capacity in our communion with the heavenly Father. If it be said that the idea of the Supreme Being is too vague from its vastness and its want of representation to awaken friendship in the worshipper, we reply that sympathy, trust, and love may flourish in a fellowship in which one of the parties is scarcely able to know anything of the other ; as in the case of a young child whose affections thrive upon the simplest impressions and the mere touch of contact. But even supposing this objection could be made good as an abstract truth, it falls to the ground in the incarnation of Christianity, where the mystery of godliness is not in its obscurity but in its revelation : "manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16, R.V.). In Jesus Christ we love God when we love man ; in the Maker of all men we behold the brother of all men : and with the reverence, the trust, and the obedience inspired by the Godhead, we have the physical sympathy, the mutual suffering, and the common destiny which are the cords by which one man is

drawn to another. Our friendship with God through Christ is not merely friendship with God, but is the model and inspiration of the entire circle of human relationships, without their frailties and their limitations. "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. xii. 50).

We cannot believe this and hold it fast without a struggle ; but this struggle is not comparable to the conflict we shall have to consider presently. There are not many persons who find it difficult to accept faith in God as the highest condition on earth of a human being ; and even those who do may find the source of their perplexity in that part of the subject which we now propose to consider : that in seeking to obtain faith in God, we must subordinate, either for use or temporary subjugation, every passion and every circumstance in life.

Here is the *fight* of faith : we do not contend here with metaphysical objections, or with the obscurities and imperfections of rational evidence ; but with fleshly lusts, which war against the soul (1 Pet. ii. 11) ; with pride and undisciplined desire ; with those idols which the mind makes for itself, and which gratify its covetousness, its sloth, its bigotry, its self-glory, and its hatred of subjection. Here the contest is with self. If in seeking faith in God "thy right eye offend thee," if that which belongs to thee, which was created by God Himself for thy use, is perverted from its use, and interferes with that within thee which is higher than itself, mortify it, even though its disuse mar the symmetry of thy life ; it is more profitable for thee that thou shouldest do without it ; it is for transcendent interests that these temporary losses and humiliations must be incurred. Every man must determine for himself which is the

stumbling-block of his path. Our Lord, by suggesting three, the right eye, the right hand, and the foot, covers everything which is supposed to minister to pleasure and advancement ; by rudely treating the most delicate and sensitive organ of the body, and disabling that which gives uprightness, support, and locomotion to the frame, the Divine Teacher shows that the finest and most cultured sentiments may be in our way, and the strongest and, considered in themselves, the noblest principles, principles which are intended to lead men on, may have a fatal bias, and make them step aside instead of marching forward.

I need scarcely add that there is indicated in the words of our Lord the exquisite suffering of the mortification which He demands. It is in the first instance personal and solitary : sometimes rising to prolonged agony. There is a fight which we maintain as a Church against current unbelief ; against the selfish and persecuting spirit of the world ; against the bold wickedness of the age. In this public conflict we may play our part with a very small amount of self-mortification ; we may get behind the brave and share the cheer that properly belongs to them. The veriest cowards may be on the winning side and imagine that they also merit the distinction of victors. The danger of this delusion did not escape the great Teacher, for nothing escaped Him : “ Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven ” (Matt. vii. 21). And he puts a remonstrance into the mouth of these cheap defenders who fight well enough outside themselves, but never face the foe which is in their hearts: “ Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name do many mighty works ? ” Listen to

the words by which these recreants are spurned from the presence of the Conqueror: “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (vers. 22, 23).

The personal character of our conflict is also strikingly exhibited in the letters which Christ dictated to the seven churches of Asia. He had something to allege against most of them: laxity in discipline, heresy in doctrine, abatement of zeal, all of which faults belong to a community. But from the manner in which He concludes the epistles, it is evident that these faults sprang from individual declension in the vigour and courage of every man’s inward fight. “*He* that overcometh” is blended with every salutation, not, they that overcome; and in the last letter He joins Himself with every bold and patient fighter of sin: “he that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. ii. iii.).

These are not mere words of fellowship in battle: they would be invaluable to every soldier if they were no more than this: for example is the nutriment of courage. But Christ is the essential genius of our daring, our endurance, and our success. He not only offers to take part in any honest resistance to evil, but there can be no victory without him. He agonised to enter the strait gate of submission, “Father, not My will, but Thine, be done,” that when you should happen to be in the anguish of an eager yet doubtful endeavour to surrender your will to Heaven, His sympathy and omnipotence might ensure your triumph. You who are discouraged because you have been so often defeated, who find it hard even to revive a resolution to try again, lift up one thought of prayer to Him, and He will descend and place Himself at your side in a moment. If you will

invite Him to your inner council of war, and place the cause of the conflict in His hands, you shall never fail again. It is true that His arm and shield will never so act as to take from you the necessity of fighting ; but the battle will no longer be yours, but the Lord's. Every blow you give to lust, to covetousness, to pride, to untruthfulness, you will deliver in His name, and He will take care that you shall deliver it in His strength.

But not merely is Jesus the Lord of the battle of life, to be resorted to in seasons of conflict. Even in these seasons you can never be victorious unless you make Him the Lord of all seasons. You must make over to Him the entire sphere of your life ; and this surrender of yourselves will bring you into so intimate a relation with Him, that you will rather walk by faith than by sense. Intellectual difficulties, if they do not vanish, will cease to be impeding to progress; while the more obstinate resistance of the flesh, which word I use in its widest meaning, will gradually die into simple passiveness ; and your life, in its springs, its course, and its issues, will be Christ. Listen to some of the last words of an old soldier, who was ending what many of you are beginning : “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day : and not to me only, but also to all them that love His appearing” (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8).



VIII

## Temptation



## TEMPTATION

And lead us not into temptation.—MATT. vi. 13.

CARRY us not where we shall be solicited to sin. There is a touch of fear and an air of distrust in the petition ; and no wonder, for it follows the cry, Forgive us our trespasses. “Thou hast forgiven the sins that are past, sins which were the conquests of temptation and had nearly destroyed me ; but the future may be more full of danger than the past. The temptations of to-morrow may be stronger than the perils of yesterday. I am saved now, I am not so sure I shall be saved always : I am afraid ; Father, lead Thy newly pardoned but still helpless child away from temptation.” There is in this a vein of timid self-distrust, exquisitely proper to the character of the petitioner. The Lord’s Prayer is not the strain of a perfect soul, but of an imperfect, a sinful creature ; or a child that has been delivered from danger, and fears to encounter it again. God extricated His child from the folds of a serpent when the monster was pressing him to death ; and although he now walks with his Almighty Father, his mind is naturally shaken by the recent conflict ; his imagination is haunted by fancies of the evil one, he clasps convulsively the stronger hand by his side, and yet he fears. He starts at every sight, at every sound, looking about him instead of looking up. The Father is

guiding him aright, but still the child cries, “Lead me not into danger, lead me not where it is possible for me to be assailed again.” Observe, there is in this cry no distrust of God; no suspicion that the Father will conduct His child to danger: the cry is a reflection of the child’s fear; and the answer to the prayer is, Fear not, “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. x. 13).

Let us notice the sensitiveness to danger implied in the cry.

There is here not merely a fear of sin, but a fear of something which is not sin, temptation; a dread of the solicitations of sin. There is such a horror of sin itself that the entrances which lead to it are dreaded, and even the shadows that recall it are hateful. Those who have not been convinced of sin cannot sympathise with the prayer of the text; and we cannot be convinced of sin by any description of it. The Spirit of God alone can discover to us the nature and the end of sin. You are compelled to acknowledge it to be evil; it is the synonym for evil. You refer all moral disorders to it; but, unless you have felt its plague in your own spirit, you cannot fear it. You may be afraid to commit certain acts that would make you forfeit your position in society; and you prudently avoid scenes and situations that might tempt you to misconduct; but although those acts are sins and those circumstances that solicit are temptations, you fear them rather because public opinion will punish you if you commit them, than because sin is the abominable thing which God hateth. But separate yourselves from public observation; imagine yourselves beyond the reach of censure; suppose that you were

able to follow the leadings of your own heart; confident that your actions would never be scrutinised, that you would never hear of them to your disadvantage in this world, that no one would be hurt or grieved by what you did, would you be as scrupulous then as you are this day? Would the proposals of sin be shocking when the acts of sin ceased to be scandalous? I speak not of crimes and excesses to which education, taste, and conscience make you more or less averse; I speak of sins to which you in your present state of moral culture would be exposed, in the absence of all restraint. Follow out this thought, and you will see how much of your fear of sin is the dread of opinion; which, although it be the great safeguard of public morals, is not the fear which lies at the root of this prayer. It is a fear irrespective of opinion; not the fear of disgrace, not the fear of injuring others<sup>or</sup> or being injured by others. These elements may attach to the sentiment by the force of association, but they do not constitute it. Sin is alienating the heart from God. However it may express itself in conduct, it is a state of mind forbidden by the all-seeing Spirit, and because it is so—and only because it is so—it is sin. Those who are thoroughly convinced of this, need no other witness than God, and no further result than His dissatisfaction, to make them feel conscious of the iniquity and danger of sin. They feel His mind to be personally cognisant of theirs. He is their public opinion, His glance of displeasure is their shame; the wrong-doing stands out with a hideous exposure because it is done against their God and Father. They are humbled for having swerved from right, they are broken for having grieved love.

Moreover, a conviction of sin is rendered the more intense by the method of its atonement. It never looks so frightful

in aspect as when it walks side by side with the spotless Jesus. It is indeed the true Belial when its revolting gait and malignant aims contrast with the meek footsteps and sublime charity of Christ. It never so impresses upon us its wonderful wickedness and desolating power as when it bows to the earth the spirit of the Son of God, and makes almost a wreck of a mind that never committed it; as when He felt it needful to submit to death, even the death of the cross, for its sake. When the sinner fails in his life, and is hunted to the grave by misfortune and disappointment, and dies the victim of delusion and sorrow, he simply expiates his own folly and guilt. But when the Holy One who came down from heaven to rescue us from sin, and was brought for the first time into human relationship with the results of sin, discovers to us how it affected Him; when that which we had done was permitted to pass upon Him; when He could not master the anguish of its woe or escape the stroke of its death, we see the unspeakable enormity of the guilt of sin and we see the reach of its curse. If there can be no forgiveness of sin without the sufferings of Christ, what other argument do I need to hate it, fear it, hide from it? He loved me, and for no other reason that I can know, He gave Himself to sorrow, pain, and death, that He might be able to put away my sin; it was my sin that cost Him the long humiliation and travail of His life; He stood up the antagonist of sin, and sheltered me while He contended with it; He wrestled with it "with strong crying and tears" (Heb. v. 7); He was wounded by innumerable thrusts and bled at every wound; He took the cup of death appointed for me and drank it: and therefore, by every argument that can convince me as a man, by every sentiment that can bind me as a disciple, by every duty that can weigh with

me as a friend, by every oath that can ratify a covenant, by every appeal that can recall a tender memory, touch gratitude, and command loyalty to a Deliverer, I am made the implacable enemy of sin, the universal antagonist of the devil and all his works ; I cherish a personal abhorrence of the tempter ; and his temptations I fear with a great fear, because “in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. vii. 18). I bear in my heart the material that favours temptation ; hating sin as I do, I know that in an unwatchful moment conscience may slumber and resolution be surprised ; and the power which gave woe and death to Christ, and which I am sworn to resist even unto death, may re-enslave me unawares and lead me against the God I love. It is no wonder that the Christian, with an experience and with feelings like these, should make it a main business of his life to watch and pray against temptation ; and those who have no sense of danger are still in the danger we fear, and in perils infinitely greater from their insensibility to them.

Notice, secondly, the self-distrust of the cry, “Lead me not into any temptation.” We have shown that the remembrance of past sins sharpens our sense of danger ; in the same proportion it keeps alive the feeling of that weakness through which we fell. We are afraid of the enemy, and have no confidence in ourselves. But the prayer is, “Lead me not into temptation.”

Am I not safe if God leads me, even if it be into temptation ? Surely He will lead me out. In one aspect of the subject this is correct enough ; but consider the mood of the prayer : it is the cry of one recently delivered from sin ; or one that has escaped the serious risks of a great temptation ; or one whose future is uncertain and threatening. In

particular states the Christian mind has no sense of fear, and exults in language that borders on presumption, but is not presumption : "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13). But the cry of the text is not an experience of exceptional confidence ; it represents an impatience of danger, and a longing to be placed beyond harm ; for the addition of the words following makes one prayer, "Deliver us from evil." The petition, however, is not inconsistent with the loftiest courage. When self-distrust arises from the absence of resolution, it is mean : it is that state in which our enemies are glad to find us ; but when it springs from a correct knowledge of ourselves, and moves us to transfer our confidence to a stronger arm than ours, it is wisdom and a pledge of triumph. The self-distrust of prayer is strength rather than weakness, for prayer is its expression and its hope ; and the less we think of our own resources, the more single and intense will be our cry to the all-sufficient One. The Christian's self-distrust with regard to temptation is universal. There is no selection of temptation in the text ; as if it were, "Lead me not into this or into that temptation ; I can bear all others" ; but, "Lead me not into any temptation ; I am afraid of all solicitations to sin." God may not answer our wish to the letter ; for He does sometimes lead His people into temptation ; but He accepts the prayer and substantially honours it. If He conducts them where their faith will be tried, He will gird it with a sufficient shield, and bring it out of the conflict stronger and purer than when the trial began. But wherever He may guide us, it is safe to cry at every step, "Lead me not into temptation." The habit of such a prayer is a complete suit of armour for the soul. In its very act of crying against temptation, it is made temptation-proof at all points : the

sense of danger makes it look about, and self-distrust makes it look up ; its walk is circumspect, its temper dependent.

Let me say to young men and young women, Beware of a false self-reliance ; its real name is conceit. In the comparatively indifferent matters of taste and behaviour it is ridiculous, and will be kept under by the good-humoured laughter of our friends or the satirical hints of our observers ; but in the all-important matter of temptation, false self-reliance is not a fool, but a murderer. It has destroyed many a young man and many a young woman ; especially among the educated and religious classes. There was on the part of the victims a reliance on what they called Christian principle and educated taste. It was rather a dependence on a proud resolution to test for themselves the strength of temptation ; a resolution partly helped forward by the prospect of certain initial enjoyments that are always to be found in the neighbourhood of sin. They saw many fall before they fell ; they never intended to fall. What was their education worth, what was the value of their religious training, if these advantages rendered them no service in temptation ? Was it not a fact that vice was chiefly successful with the poor, the vulgar, and the untaught ? Their stronger mental fibre and their better moral health could brave the infections of vice. And thus led on by curiosity and supported by imaginary principles, they drew near to the confines of sin. God never sent them there—that is, duty never called them. They became familiar with what at first shocked them : from loathing they passed to enduring ; from enduring to desiring ; from desiring to having.

Young men, if you are armed, thank God for it ; but do not seek your enemy out : wait until he comes to

you, or until you are led against him. There are circles which you cannot visit without danger. I will grant, if you like, that the pleasures they offer are not sinful in themselves; but you know as well as I do that the good principles of which you boast are not so strong in those circles as they are away from them; you know that if ever the good that is in you threatens to give way, it is in such circumstances. Is it not something worse than inconsistency to kneel before your heavenly Father in the morning, and cry, "Lead me not into temptation," and to pass your evening in an atmosphere of allurement? Many stronger than you have fallen: who are you that you should bear about a charmed virtue? Lay this down as a rule, that the occupation, the companion, the book, in the fellowship of which your moral good is not strengthened, but weakened, must, if there be no higher duty in the way, be discarded. If there be a duty that makes your connexion with possible evil a necessity, He who disarmed by His presence the fury of a furnace, and changed into mildness the instinct of a lion, when His prophets were exposed, will be as near to you and as mighty to save. Peter was sincere when he offered his life for his Master, and drew his sword to defend him at the moment of Christ's arrest; but, confiding in his own manfulness, his loyalty, in one short hour, melted into apostasy! The day before the fall, Christ had warned him of the enemy's approach: "Simon, Satan hath desired to have you." And the same day, the Lord whispered to him, while they were in the garden together, "Pray lest ye enter into temptation" (Luke xxii. 31, 40). Peter thought he was stronger than his brethren: "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matt. xxvi. 33). He rested upon his superior posi-

tion among the Twelve ; he thought this position built up his character, but it only magnified his self-importance.

Young women, your outward conduct in its main actions is insured by many guarantees ; but suffer one word of advice : your temptation is to think lightly of very grave matters ; to let everything give way to the whim of the hour. Beware of trifling ; trifling with truth, trifling with sincerity, trifling with friendship, trifling with religion, trifling with any duty. You who have given your hearts to God find it sometimes hard work to repress the fickleness, giddiness, and idle musing which are rather the quickly passing shades of your temperament than distinct faults ; but fear not ; only let the prayer be sincere as you clasp the strong hand of Him to whom you offer it, “Lead me not into temptation.”

Having considered the sensitiveness to danger and the self-distrust implied in the prayer, we come to the cry itself, “Lead us not into temptation.” We need not further expound it ; for the meaning will have been sufficiently clear in the observations already made ; but we may encourage each other to offer it. “After this manner,” said the tempted Christ, “pray ye.” His life was one temptation. Human nature in Him was pressed to evil by satanic arts and forces, until hell itself was exhausted ; but His life was also one triumph. He not only never yielded, but He always conquered. Remember, moreover, that He permitted Himself to be assailed, that in saving you He might add to the power of His arm the succour of His sympathy ; He laid Himself open, even to the remotest boundary of His nature, to the multiform hostility of our common enemy, that He might comprehend in His experience every class of trial (Heb. iv. 15).

Where is that Saviour at this moment? At the right hand of God. And where are His enemies? He has His feet upon their necks! This, then, is our position: we are offering to our Father a certain prayer; it goes up in the name of His Son, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and Himself triumphs over what we fear. Then let the prayer arise from every heart, and let the spirit of it expand over our separate states; let those who are in danger offer it, and those who are afraid of danger; every condition and every sentiment may find its expression in the words; it is substantially a cry for guidance and perpetual deliverance. There may be on the part of some a gloomy dissent: "I cannot join you in the prayer; I might have offered it once; but I have been led into temptation, I am in temptation now, and in sin. I cannot very well be worse than I am. I might to some advantage have used the prayer earlier; I did repeat it; I never prayed it. I repeated it on the day I fell; I repeat it still; but there is no meaning, no heart in it, as it comes from my lips." Then alter the prayer to suit your own case; change its form thus: "Lead me out of temptation and out of sin." And He who heard David's cry from a horrible pit and lifted up His fallen child (Ps. xl. 2) will come as swiftly to the voice of your supplication. The strong man armed has bound his prisoner hand and foot; but the stronger than he is coming to liberate the captive; at His touch the linked iron will snap like cotton at the touch of fire (Luke xi. 21, 22).

IX

The Lord thinketh upon me



## THE LORD THINKETH UPON ME

The Lord thinketh upon me.—PSALM xl. 17.

THERE is one peculiarity which stands out to distinguish the Christian religion from all other faiths : the minuteness and sympathetic temper of the divine regard. The reason of this peculiarity is near at hand. The particular and personal providence of God is not one of those discoverable truths that comprise natural religion. Our impressions from nature are rather opposed to the doctrine ; and when we hear it taught, the language of first thoughts resembles the meditation of the early astronomer : “ When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained ; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him ? ” (Ps. viii. 3, 4). The creation impresses upon us two ideas, vastness and order ; and we deduce from them, as belonging to the Creator, greatness and government. We are presently made aware that we belong to a system ; that our life is an ordinance, as the motion of the heavenly bodies and the course of the seasons are ordinances.

The scientific pursuit of this thought has transported some men out of the religion of faith altogether, and led them to depress the rank of an intelligent and responsible being to a mere species in animal physiology. It seems wonderful, and yet there is no marvel in it, that science should be sure-

footed in every path of research, except when she treads the domain of human nature. I say it is no marvel, because, in the first place, man is unfairly studied by our philosophers. They do not consider him as a whole, but in two parts ; his physical and mental condition ; and the branches of science under which these divisions are arranged are so distinct from each other, and are supposed to have so little in common, that your anatomists are often profoundly ignorant of the human mind, and your mental philosophers are equally uninformed respecting the functions of the human body. The students of the body and the students of the mind have not been altogether unsuccessful in their respective departments of enquiry ; but the body itself is not man, nor the mind either, and any conclusion suggested by the physical structure or the mental, will in all likelihood be a mistake if it professes to cover the entire nature of man.

But, secondly, there is another reason for the failures of scientific investigation into the nature of man : religion or the worship of the Supreme Being has not been considered a part of human nature, but an accident of it ; like those uncertain peculiarities that distinguish races, the peculiarities of stature, complexion, manners, and belief—qualities determined by climate, tradition, and education. Whereas religion is as natural from the constitution of the mind, and as necessary from the features of life, as seeing is natural from the organism of the eye, and food is essential to the maintenance of the body. You may assume that it is not, and live without it, as you may extinguish your sight and live on in blindness. You may destroy, or impair much that belongs to a man's nature, and yet not kill the man, you simply mutilate him.

The question, however, is not, what parts of a man you may

destroy without extinguishing his life, but what is essential to his nature as a man, what originally and organically belongs to it? We maintain that religion belongs to it, that the structure of the mind supposes religion, that the duties of life can find no adequate inspiration, either in respect of stimulus or restraint, in the absence of religion. You may deny this statement, and support your denial by selecting examples of particular men. There is a man discharging the necessary obligations of life without religion, a proof that faith in the Supreme Being is not a component part of human nature. But this mode of argument is equally unsatisfactory and unfair; for, not to mention that a man's character may be largely indebted to religion and he not acknowledge it, or not even know it, the question is, can human fellowship be sustained and human progress warranted without it? Look at it as affecting the masses. Can families be built up, and nations governed, on principles compatible with order, purity, and freedom, without the acknowledgment of a God. I shall go to history for my answer, and not to comparative anatomy. I shall experiment, not on bones and fossils, but on living masses of people. These are my authorities, and the history of any nation will furnish unanswerable proofs that the faculties of religion are inherent in man. Sometimes rulers have been atheists, and have suppressed the symbols of faith by law; but the pent-up sympathy of the people for invisible things, for the powers above them, has found vent at last in forms of demonstration which their rulers have thought it prudent to indulge.

But while natural religion, or the impressions of creation undistracted by a false or an imperfect science, teaches the grand truth, *The Lord made me*, a truth which with more

or less clearness is accepted by every people under heaven, the Christian religion reveals a further and otherwise undiscoverable range of the same truth: *The Lord thinketh upon me.* The naturalist sings, “The Lord made me.” It is the highest note of his Te Deum; and a glorious anthem it is. In this faith of nature you consider yourself part of an equal creation. Your mind is carried out into the infinity above, around, and beneath you; it is thronged with images of grandeur, diversity, and beauty: and though you seem diminished to an atom, a mere point, lost in the splendours and revolutions of the universe, you exult in the thought that you also came from the mind that rolled out from itself the conception and plan of the creation, that those “fingers” of infinite art moulded you into form, that the first and everlasting breath united you with surrounding life and soul; and you worship, you adore “the eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. i. 20), to the idea of which you have been conducted “by the things that are made.” It is true that you worship you know not what. For if you call the creating Spirit, Father, it is because that name most readily suggests the relation which nature supposes your Maker to sustain towards you. But whether He is a personal Father, or an impersonal Creator, or what He has immediately to do with you, or you with Him, you can have no certain knowledge. So much for the faith of the naturalist, which in spite of its limitations is an elevating and refining principle. It is, however, a rudimentary thing, of which the perfect growth is the revelation of Christ.

The Father made me, is the alphabet of science; the Father thinketh upon me, is the alphabet advanced to the arrangement of letters for the perfect expression of the truth. Let those who doubt this, who think it unsafe to go beyond

the impressions of nature, who think that to push on from nature to miracle is to enter a region where reason can find no building ground, consider this: that the value of a natural faith in God is its hallowing effect upon the mind and the life. A feeling of the surrounding presence of the Eternal Spirit mortifies the pride and chastens the selfishness of man; it disputes the reign of sensuality, fills his mind with objects higher than his own ends, and awakens intimations of immortality, which, though uncertain, are in the highest degree ennobling: in one word, it converts an animal into a man. The faith of nature does this; and noble examples occur to us of men who were obedient to that faith, not because it gave them all they wished, but all they could get; they longed for more; they held fast to "The Lord made me," and we can imagine how their deeply musing and anxious spirits would have leaped for joy, if the remoter truth had visited them, as it has visited us: "The Lord thinketh upon me." Now, all the effects upon the mind which give value to a naturalist's faith are indefinitely advanced in the spirit of a Christian; the moral result in each case corresponds with the clearness of knowledge respectively attained.

We said just now that even such a vague intimation of immortality as nature inspires exalts the man who cherishes it. But the religion of Christ raises this idea into the persuasion of certain truth. He "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. i. 10). The occasional visitations of a splendid dream become the ever-abiding conviction of the judgment and the realisation of the heart; and the man so persuaded has begun his immortality, attributes an infinite importance to his present life, and produces from that life results

of virtue purer, wider, and more steadily drawn out, than can possibly grow from the rude hints of a natural faith. Again, if the knowledge that the Lord made me, that I am His offspring, the creation of His power and goodness, can raise me above self, inspire prayer and trust, and make me live in modest fear and humbleness, the belief that *the Lord thinketh upon me* raises me not only above self, but to Him, for I am in His mind as a separate object of interest and love. Two minds mutually conscious of each other are mutually imparted, and live in each other. Supposing a union something like this to be possible between God and man, can you conceive the human mind under any condition so favourable to the perfecting of all that is good and great in man? We shall show presently how far such a personal fellowship with God is provided for and accomplished by the Christian faith.

But first, let me dispose of an objection to the doctrine of this minuteness, this personal sympathy of the divine regard, which is rather a prejudice than a reason. Science has frightened some people by the magnitude of its calculations. When we are told that this earth in the surrounding stellar system is no more than a leaf in a forest, that its sudden displacement could hardly be noticed by an eye that commands the universe, we are confounded for the moment with bulk and distances and periods. Reason is overridden by the imagination; we are distressed, overwhelmed, by our appalling insignificance and vanity; and, taking that side of our nature which connects us with material changes, we call ourselves a leaf, an atom, a shadow, here for an instant, and then to melt into the nothing of the past. It cannot surprise us that even Christian believers are

sometimes disturbed by conceptions of contrast like these ; and there are unchristian men of science who take these popular impressions and try to give them a learned weight, as an argument to discredit the Christian doctrine of providence. I am persuaded that that mixture of doubt and fear for the foundations of Christianity which makes us so ready to take alarm when any new scientific discovery is announced, arises from the enormous materialism surrounding us, and the immeasurable periods of its history. This difficulty is not the less felt because it is rarely expressed ; it comes into our minds unbidden, and we are scared by it like a frightened child in the dark.

But it is better to look steadily at what we fear. What do the distances, magnitudes, and durations of scientific computation amount to ? Let scientific deductions be admitted, and even scientific assumptions be taken for granted ; how do they stand as touching the Christian argument ? The whole matter as affecting Christianity and the soul of man may be put in this way : it is material bulk *versus* mind, and duration *versus* thought. To bring the subject at first a little nearer home : is not a man of more importance than a continent ? Geographers have unfolded to us the vast African world ; its mysterious river and lake system ; its ocean deserts, dotted with islands of Eden beauty ; its animal, floral, and mineral wonders. There was one man in Africa not very many years ago who, to an uninformed eye, was an insignificant creature, a mere speck upon the huge and splendid continent ; moving about from district to district with tribes of unknown savages ; with a life so fragile and defenceless that a fever or wild beast might end it at any moment ; and it did end at last apparently in extreme meanness and obscurity. But

within that poor worn body was a mind whose energy, science, and faith changed the destinies of a fourth part of the globe. What is mere matter in its hugest and most imposing aspects to a man like Livingstone? and how strikingly was this superiority of mind confessed at that moment in the curiosity of the civilised world to learn, not the condition of Africa, but the fate of Livingstone! What is a planet or a soulless planetary system compared with the thinking, working mind of one man?

And with regard to periods of time, I am not disposed to be alarmed at the inconceivable cycles of geology. Time to me is nothing without thought. One day is the same as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Let us suppose that five thousand years passed over the continent of Australia before man knew it and began to work upon it: for anything gained by that period it might as well have been five days. But now every week in that colony is pregnant with history, every hour impresses a change upon the world. Five minutes' life in this London of ours involves issues more vast in their significance than five millions of mere animal and vegetable history. Our great Teacher, Himself the Ancient of days, has condensed into a few sentences this whole subject of mind as against matter, and of thought as against animal life. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. x. 29, 30). And why of more value? Because, as our Lord intimates in the context, there is an indestructible soul in the man. Let a sparrow die, and it falls; not unnoticed by the Father, but irretrievably. Let a man be slain, and his

condition is simply changed ; the man himself lives on. With a blending of ineffable sweetness and majesty does He declare this truth to the disciples : " My friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do " (Luke xii. 4).

Jesus did not teach lessons of self-exaltation ; He preached humility and contrition. But if we may not exalt ourselves, He has a right to lift us up ; and whose heart does not thrill with the sublimity of his rank as Christ calls God His Father, and us His friends ? He does not declare God to be the Father of creation, but the Father of men. " Not a sparrow falls without your Father " ; not the Father of the sparrow : your Father. And because He is your Father, " the very hairs of YOUR head are all numbered." The events of your life are a connected whole ; no occurrence falls off into chance and random. Even what you would consider the smallest, the most fugitive incidents of the day have their place in the computation ; the Father watches them come, and do their work upon you, and disappear. The words of Christ in the New Testament on this subject may be fitly compared with the words of Christ in the Old Testament ; for so I take the language of that celebrated passage in the eighth chapter of Proverbs. The Son of God is the Wisdom of that description : " The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." And then the divine Wisdom, in a few sentences of unparalleled sublimity, recounts the creation of the universe, the preparation and storing of the heavens, the diffusion and limitations of the firmament, the establishment of all the great physical decrees and affinities, in all of which there are vast images of bulk and duration ; but not

in these was the delight or fellowship of Wisdom, though Wisdom had made them all. The Son always rejoiced before the Father ; and when a part of the earth became habitable, His “delights were with the sons of men.”

It was reciprocal thought that drew out His joy. Men were the children of His image, He could consort with them. This wonderful drawing towards men, this passing by of material splendours, and counting them as the small dust of the balance in comparison with human intelligence, its needs and its prospects, is brought out into detail by St. Paul, who probably took his text from the Proverbs passage : “Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son : in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins : who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature : for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers : all things were created by Him, and for Him : and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist” (Col. i. 12-17).

It follows from all this, that there is really no importance in the sceptical suggestions of philosophy that the vast formations, the incredible spaces, and the enormous periods of the universe throw discredit upon the alleged personal care of our heavenly Father. This scepticism reflects on the attributes of God ; on the minute personality of His care. No words can more affectingly display that care than our text, “The Lord thinketh upon me.” This personal regard is represented in Scripture by a variety of teaching. We have it under the image of the family register. The

carefully prepared genealogies of the Jews, and their jealous watchfulness over the integrity of their race, are types of this particular providence. The dedication of the first-born to God, and the public enrolment of the generations of kings and priests, pointed out the Church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and are made kings and priests unto God. The genealogical type of the Old Testament is first explained by our Lord : “ Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you ; but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven ” (Lukex. 20). And from the time our Lord sanctioned it, it became a favourite description of our title to heaven. We have already alluded to the passage in Hebrews respecting the Church of the first-born ; and St. Paul in his Philippian epistle, in mentioning some of his friends by name, excuses the omission of other names by affirming that they were registered elsewhere, in the book of life. In the Revelation of St. John it occurs with remarkable frequency. One or two instances must suffice : “ He that overcometh, I will in nowise blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name ” (Rev. iii. 5). And again, “ Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire ” (Rev. xx. 15). Such expressions as “ heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ,” “ the inheritance of the saints in light,” and “ the redemption of the purchased possession,” belong to the same imagery, setting forth the primogeniture of all God’s children, in the sense in which God called the people of Israel His “ first-born ” : “ Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is My son, even My first-born ” (Ex. iv. 22). Your name in the family book shows your birth in the family, your separate rank and order, the place you fill in the home ; it is the legal assurance of your affinity. You may be the weakest child, the

most faulty, the least gifted ; yet for all purposes of family privilege you have an equal right with the strongest and the brightest ; you partake in the affections, sympathies, cares, and honours of the house. Every child is precious simply because he is a child. But the Scriptures teach the Almighty's personal care and recognition by another symbol, a *seal*. The name by which you are called is your register in the book ; that book is a thing apart from you. You did not register your name there, and you do not keep the book ; but the seal is the public mark of your rank which you yourself wear. Seals were sometimes worn on the arm, sometimes on the finger, sometimes on the breast, sometimes on the forehead (*Song of Sol.* viii. 6). In this way the Holy Ghost puts His mark upon us ; not sealing us by congregations and families, but by individuals. Every one is taken apart to receive the signet, the character and impression of God's own finger. There are other images which teach us that every one of God's people has a separate place in the divine regard, such as the dedication of a temple : "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you ?" (*1 Cor.* vi. 19). There is also the legal appropriation of property : "Ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price : glorify God therefore in your body."

As to the character of that regard, can anything exceed the tenderness of the expression, "The Lord thinketh upon me"? And what are His thoughts concerning us? "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." Here is a reference to thoughts that may naturally occur to us, thoughts of evil. If we think at all on the subject, we are disposed to imagine that God's thoughts toward us, if He has any, are answerable to the

guilt in which we feel ourselves condemned. It is our sin that awakens in us hard thoughts of God. We condemn ourselves; we ourselves would show no mercy to such as we are; and our spirit is narrowed by the dread of future retribution. In our Lord's personal intercourse with men, and in such of His parables as are founded upon the customs and spirit of the Jewish people, we have the deeply interesting spectacle of the thoughts of God brought into contrast with the thoughts of man in daily life. Man is unjust in his very equity. After he has been forgiven the debt of thousands of gold, he imprisons his fellow-servant for the debt of a few pence; he grudges the generosity of an employer to the labourers of the eleventh hour; at the sight of the unfortunate, he passes by on the other side; he is for stoning, expelling, or forsaking the guilty. Sinners are far harder in their judgment of sin than Jesus the sinless one. The mercy of Christ to the guilty, the wretched, and the abandoned was as much superior to the public opinion of the people around Him, as His soul was larger and His life purer than theirs. On all questions respecting hope, and pardon, and the recuperative powers of human nature, we are reminded of Jehovah's declaration in Isaiah: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord" (Isa. iv. 8). To those who imagine that God has hard thoughts toward them, let Him answer for Himself: "My thoughts toward you, toward all of you, are thoughts of peace, to give you an expected end; a hope of deliverance, and the deliverance itself" (Jer. xxix. 11). This was the song that heralded the gift of Jesus: "On earth peace"; and the life which He offered up, the blood which He shed, was an instrument of peace. His first thought for us was a thought of love, and His sufferings were the embodiment of that thought.



X

## The Sanctuary of Life



## THE SANCTUARY OF LIFE

And He taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?—MARK xi. 17.

It does not fall within the scope of our exposition of this passage to dwell upon the singular and intensely interesting event in vindication of which this Old Testament utterance was repeated by our Lord. It will be sufficient to state, as a preliminary observation, that this cleansing of the Temple court, like the triumphant entry into Jerusalem that went before it, was a symbolic act. In the procession into the city Christ declared Himself the King of men; in the simplicity and local character of the surroundings of that march, He taught that His kingdom was not of this world. In expelling a worldly traffic from holy places He proclaimed Himself the High Priest of the Temple; and as those parts whose sanctity He restored were in the Court of the Gentiles, and therefore belonged to the world, He showed that He was the Priest of all nations. As our Lord's violent purification of the Temple was symbolic, so the building itself was a symbol.

It was the type of Himself and the type of His Church. It was the type of Himself because every division and feature of its ceremonial found its explanation and fulfilment in Him. It was not, speaking accurately, the Jewish Temple, but the world's Temple. Through the

entire period of its history there was always a stranger within its gates to put in a claim for the world. The presence of that stranger and the recognition of him in all the provisions of the Israelitish covenant, interpreted the scope of the doctrines and rites of the Temple. That scope was not limited either by geography or ethnology. Any stranger would have been admitted, even if he had come up from the lowest and most inhuman of the Central African tribes. The ministers of that Temple would not have dared to close the Gentile entrance against the most loathsome pagan, if he desired to worship there.

The rights and responsibilities of the heathen are declared even in the appointment of the passover before the exodus from Egypt : "When a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let him be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it" (Exod. xii. 48). And because the ten commandments were intended for the human race, the stranger finds a place in them also : "In the Sabbath of the Lord thy God thou shalt do no work, thou, . . . nor thy stranger that is within thy gates" (Exod. xx. 10). We might pursue the characteristics of the Temple in its typical relationship to Christ, as for instance, its miraculous origin, its doctrinal pre-eminence, its double realm of heaven and earth, the meeting-place of the visible and the invisible ministries, and its ever-renewed warrant of reconciliation and prayer. But that feature of likeness between Christ and the Temple which this text makes conspicuous is universality, or illimitable provision : the Temple of all nations prefiguring the Christ of all nations.

This brings us to the other truth, which is the necessary sequence of the fact we have just affirmed ; that the Temple was also a type of Christ's Church. Those passages in the

New Testament will at once occur to you in which the disciples of Jesus are summed up in the expression, "the building of God." I will not speak separately of the familiar analogies of foundation, cohesion of parts, strength of setting, and beauty of style and ornamentation; these quickly suggest themselves when you think of a building and the intellectual and social compact of men. But here also, as in its typical resemblance to Christ, the chief idea which the Temple bequeaths to the Church for fulfilment is indefinite comprehension: a Church for all nations, whose Builder and Maker is God (Heb. xi. 10). As the first tabernacle was not the offspring of human genius, but the faithful copy and rendering of a heavenly model, "for, See, saith He" to Moses, "that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount" (Heb. viii. 5), so the Church of Christ on earth is a divine conception: it is divine in the order and dimensions of its structure; in the principle of the unity of its parts; and in the energies which carry on its erection.

For any body of men to declare that they are the Church, and they only, is to assume that the plans of God's architecture have been delivered into their hands, and that they only possess the secret idea of the great Builder; which secret would seem to be this, that the area within which the foundations of the edifice are laid is fenced round by their creed! This conceit is a very ancient superstition; Jeremiah stigmatises it with great plainness of speech: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these" (Jer. vii. 4). I hesitate not to say that this absurd myth is the bulwark of modern infidelity. I will challenge any thoughtful man who knows something of the history of

the human race, something of the principles of the material world, something of the capacity of the human mind, and demand of him whether the assumption that the universal God, the Creator of the infinite heavens, has restricted the bounty of salvation to a limited number and order of human beings, and has made them the sole depositary and the sole purveyors of His immortal gifts, would not tempt him to a disdainful rejection of the entire system of Christianity. I am satisfied that this monstrous pretence is the explanation of the infidelity of civilised countries. Whether it be the thoughtful scepticism of Germany, the light-hearted unbelief of France, or the auricular atheism of Italy, it grows for the most part from one root, the discordance which exists between the assumptions of an exclusive priesthood and the judgment of educated men. If the philosophic minds of Europe would turn from Churches to the New Testament, and study the living Christ of the Scriptures, instead of the Christ-effigy of the priest, infidelity would disappear from learning and morals, and retreat to its own den of illiterate wickedness.

We therefore, in the name of Christ, solemnly repudiate the claims of any body of men, whatsoever their traditions, their number, and their present power, who would designate their peculiar institution the Church for all nations. The Church for all nations consists of the followers of the Christ of all nations; "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor. i. 2).

It may here be said that to prove that no one visible Church is the Church of Christ, to the exclusion of other Christian federations, does not involve the conclusion that the Church of Christ is for all nations ; in other words, that

Christianity is the religion of the human race. This right of the Christian faith to universal authority, and its consequent claim to universal acceptance, we shall now proceed to consider.

If religion be a real, an independent principle in human nature, if there be a bond or obligation of duty and obedience towards a supreme Mind, it seems probable that there should be one revelation of it, and not many. We assume, of course, the unity of the race. We cannot suppose a number of equally authorised religions: for, in the first place, divided authorities in faith would mean the destruction of all authority; and, in the second place, as the one race would, in progress of time, assume new features of society, tribes massing into empires, empires parting off into nations, nations overflowing into colonies, resulting in perpetual change of type, how could several faiths preserve their distinctions and do their work in the midst of an unceasing flux of kindreds, peoples, and tongues? The moral condition which any religion is intended to meet is pretty much the same in every age and in every nation; the variety is in degree. It is nothing more and nothing less than a cold, dark selfishness which separates us from God first, and then from each other. It follows that the ideal success of religious agencies is making the world the home of one family, and that family the children of one Father in heaven.

So much is suggested to us as probable by the nature of religion itself, and by the unity of the human race. Now what are the facts by which we sustain the argument that Christianity is the faith of all nations?

All other religions are obscure impressions of mysteries, which in the Christian faith are distinctly revealed; and all

other religions fail absolutely in achieving the regeneration for which they are supposed to exist.

The subject of this proposition is large enough for a volume; but the facts that support the main argument are so clear, and fall so easily into arrangement, that it may be possible to state them within the space allotted to a sermon. Every religion but Christ's may be said to have "an altar with this inscription, To the unknown God" (*Acts xvii. 23*). Their worship, their devout speculations, may be described as feeling after Him if haply the worshippers may find Him. I refer especially to those nations which have an acknowledged and embodied faith. Of course, the argument includes the rudest notions of a deity. But the illustration that most clearly serves our purpose is the case of a people who are so far raised above simple savage life as to have moral sentiments; and who help their morality by supernatural sanctions. In the highest example of this class, the idea of the power that is worshipped approaches most closely the notion of a Father in heaven. It is true that in no case is this conception reached; but the reasonings and hopes of the people vibrate towards it; their poetical genius, whether it be matured into literature or not, cherishes it. You can see at once that the purest and boldest minds amongst them search for it in their own nature, and find, as they imagine, intimations of it in their traditions.

If you follow the gradations of civilisation, you may observe that the religious sentiment rises with the culture: first the fear of unseen vengeance, the devil god; next the perception of a lawgiver and the reverence of equity; then the appreciation of bounty and the hope of mercy: and whither should all this lead but to the Abba of

Christian worship? The religion for all nations is that which interprets the thoughts and fulfils the desire of all nations.

If we now pass on from the central truth of religion, the being of God, to the duties of religion, such as the due command and government of self, obedience to parental authority, the equal love of our neighbour, inner purity of thought and passion, and cherishing a fellowship of spirit with the Power we worship, including habits of humility, prayer, and conscious dependence on the unseen One, we shall find in non-Christian races a proximate conception of what is true and right and lovely and of good report in these duties ; and we shall discover that the clearness of the conception in each case is in proportion to the worshipper's idea of the God he adores. The necessity of these high moral conditions is everywhere confessed : the foremost members of every tribe, the foremost minds of every nation, dissatisfied with their respective surroundings, aim at something higher, discern the possibility of it ; some of them projecting means to attain it, others satisfying their yearnings in dreams of an earlier golden age, or of a later utopia. Their ideas may be the crudest, their visions the most absurd, but this does not touch the fact of their restlessness and their upward longings. They have not light enough to know precisely what they want—except that they want a better world ; a shelter for their fears ; a hope in their sorrows ; a deliverance from the tyranny of lust, cruelty, and selfish power, and from the iron bondage in which their better thoughts and hopes are born to die. What are these conceptions and desires, but the rude outlines of the religion of Jesus? I will not ask, Is there anything they want which Christianity cannot provide? I will go

further, there is no explanation of this condition outside the volume of the Christian Scriptures.

In no other world of nature do we find any state analogous to the miserable restlessness of the human mind ; to the perpetual aim and despair of reaching what the mind knows to be necessary. The structure and life of other animals are perfect ; what they are born to do and enjoy they compass without a pang : but man, with his immortal endowments, is debased by passions which he detests, and imprisoned in limitations which he spurns, and cheated by hopes and by ideas of possibility which never come to pass, and yet have the power to fascinate their victim and doom him to the hell of endless failure. I know that these remarks are trite and have often been made before. I only wish that the explanation of the facts were as common as their statement.

But open the Bible with a courageous honesty, and dare to prosecute this question, regardless of what the result may impose upon yourselves, and you will find here the original of every aspiration which you meet elsewhere, the reason of every condition you deplore, of wickedness, of failure, of unrest ; the ground of every cherished hope ; the substance of every better dream ; and, above all, the energies by which the dying life and mind of the world may be renewed and perfected.

Take the idea of God which prevails in the purest non-Christian religion, and place it side by side with the Jehovah of the Scriptures, and you will see the faultless embodiment of all its best elements. Take the most consistent of its incarnations, and compare it with the manifestation of God in the flesh ; and when you have enquired why the heathen system provided an incarnation at all, and have

found this to be the reason, that the abstract Deity is too distant from human affairs, that men want a local image of divine power, a god minister who should ally himself with human interests, and preside, by some typical presence or rite, in the senate, in the market, and in the home ; be accessible to prayer and dispense gifts of help and prosperity and comfort ; then study the revelation, the powers, the functions, and the position of Jesus, and tell me whether He does not realise and surpass the ideal of all incarnations ? In Him there is sympathy with frailty, and no sympathy with crime ; no clashing of heavenly attributes with earthly passions ; nothing monstrous, incongruous, or unnecessary in the display of His miraculous power ; nothing mean, narrow, or unworthy in the supernatural agencies which He evokes ; equally near to all classes, but making Himself the special champion of the poor, the sick, and the abandoned ; not to indulge them in their misfortune and to set class against class, but to harmonize all classes, to purify, invigorate, and prosper all social life, and to be Himself the pattern as well as the regenerator of all conduct.

Is the Deity we preach the Jehovah of the Jews ? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles ? Is He not the Father of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named (Eph. iii. 14, 15)—the original of all ideas and images of purity, of law, of paternal administration, and of immortality ? Is He not the dwelling-place of all mind, of all holy desire, of all hope, and of all truth ? And is not the Christianity of the Scriptures the reflection of that universal Mind ? “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. xix. 1) ; they bend over all ; they bless all ; their beneficence and their unchangeable splendours seem to consist with our idea of the Supreme and Almighty Spirit. Is it less evident

that Jesus displays the glory of God? His shelter bends over all and blesses all. When He utters that stupendous proclamation, "I am the light of the world": you are not shocked by a conceit; the words come from His lips with as much simplicity, naturalness, and self-evident reality as the dawn. "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12). If these were empty words, their vanity would be soon detected. They were spoken two thousand years ago; and in historic times; and there has been a continuous chronicle of the events and condition of the world from the hour when the glorious promise was delivered. Let me ask, Where has darkness resided during the ages that have since elapsed? It has rested upon nations which have not known Christ. There has been darkness in the midst of Christian peoples; but it has never rested upon them; it has never been unbroken gloom: the light shone in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not (John i. 5). Where it did effect an entrance in a heart, in a home, in a government, in a literature, it was the light of life. Life became a new thing: its origin was known, its mission was known, its destiny was known. Will any man dare to say that there has been one instance in which the teaching of Christ has brought with it anything but light and order and peace and progress? Will any man affirm that any other teaching has accomplished these results? Therefore Christianity for all nations, and Christ for all hearts!

XI

The Spirit's Work in the World



## THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN THE WORLD

And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.—JOHN xvi. 8.

AND when He is come unto you, He will through you reprove the world of sin. The Lord had before said concerning the Comforter, “whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him” (John xiv. 17). But if the world has no knowledge of the Spirit, and therefore no desire towards Him, the Spirit has a great desire towards the world, and a great work to do in the world; that work is all summed up in the word which in the Authorised Version is inadequately rendered *reprove*. We have not an English word that accurately and fully expresses the original. Our nearest word is *convince*; and if we add to it what we understand by the word *convict*, which is adopted in the Revised Version, we shall comprehend the verbal area of our Lord’s meaning.

The Holy Ghost will make known to the world these three facts—*sin*, *righteousness*, and *judgment*. The purpose of the Spirit’s work in the world is the salvation of the world. This must be kept strictly in view throughout our exposition, or the deep text will be a maze in which we shall be lost, instead of a clear medium through which may be seen the ways of omnipotent love. The Father so loved the world, that He gave His beloved Son to be an

atoning sacrifice for it. The Son, when He came, announced Himself The Light of the World, the light to illumine the world; and the blessed Spirit was sent to be the Advocate of the world, as Christ is our Advocate with the Father. The Holy Ghost pleads with men on behalf of Christ, as Christ pleads with the Father on behalf of men. The mission of the Comforter is strictly one of grace; it is to remedy that condition of mankind alluded to with so deep a pathos by our Lord in His intercessory prayer, "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee" (John xvii. 25).

And now, earnestly asking and waiting for His aid, let us examine the nature and effects of the Spirit's work upon the world. He convicts: the original word, as we have intimated, contains far more than any single English word can express. It means to argue, to prove, to refute, to convince, to rebuke, to convict. All these elements of mental and judicial action are embodied in it, and with more or less prominence they take their place in the work of the Holy Ghost. He has charge of three representative truths, to make them known to the world. He manifests them to men, puts them in their true light, refutes men's errors concerning them, makes it clear to themselves that they are wrong, delivers those who desire to be saved from the error of their ways, and condemns those who persist in the wrong.

1. He convinces men of the sin of *unbelief*. He shows them that unbelief is sin. It is the root of sin. The greatest, the most fearful sin that men can commit is the rejection of Christ. The message of the gospel is so framed that no apology shall be able to extenuate the act of refusing it. Men shall never say, It is too hard to be under-

stood ; for its sublimest revelations have in them a simplicity that makes them mainly intelligible even to illiterate persons, and appreciated by children. They shall never say, The doctrines of the gospel are unreasonable ; for the light which it throws upon intricate social problems, the complete and unanswerable replies which it gives to questions unsettled before, the plain and sober goodness and the eminent reasonableness which lie at the root of its laws, all of which qualities men can understand, shall prove to them that they ought to accept those supernatural features which are beyond their comprehension. They shall never say, Its purpose is unnecessary ; their own hearts and life shall tell them, and the condition of the world around shall cry aloud in their ears, that sin is an unconquerable power, that the sources of crime, disorder, and social debility are as prevailing as they are pestilent, that no remedy of human preparation has ever succeeded in effectually checking them, and that it is the business of all men, unitedly, personally, and constantly, to endeavour to remove them ; when, therefore, the gospel of Jesus presents itself to a despairing world as another hope of deliverance, a last hope, men shall never be able to object to it as unnecessary. Finally, they shall not decline to accept it because it can point to no witnesses or examples of its power. These shall always be at hand, comprising a mighty and ever accumulating argument, a vast Church of witnesses, spreading themselves over the world, not like distinct and eccentric meteors, to dazzle and perplex, but like a dawn coming from that quarter of the horizon where men expect the day, a mild, genial, useful glory, the luminous ordinance of God Himself. So convincing did the Holy Ghost make the gospel, and still makes it, defending it by every proof that can tell upon the convictions of men.

Wherever Christ is preached, hearers shall be condemned because they believe not on Him. Possibly they may not be convinced, certainly they shall be convicted.

2. But the object of the Spirit in thus making gospel truth unanswerable, and condemning those who believe not, is to make men conscious of their sin, that they may cry out after righteousness, and therefore, in the words of Christ, "He shall convince the world of *righteousness*, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more." This does not mean simply that the Spirit would convince the world that Christ was a righteous person, but that the world could find righteousness in Christ, and in Christ only; that since sin was the result of rejecting the offered Saviour, righteousness would comprise the acceptance of Him. A state of sin is the state of being without Christ; sin and righteousness being in God's judgment essentially different from man's notions of them. They both relate to our condition before God, and He alone must declare in what dispositions they consist. He has revealed His blessed Son, and sent Him to be our deliverer; before that Son appears, we are in a state of condemnation; He is our way back to the Father (John xiv. 6), our only way; and when the Father's gift is made known to us, and we do not regard it, the Holy Ghost, whose influence pervades the message of the preacher, proves to us the sin of putting the gift from us, and the hopeless future of those who live on without Christ.

The question that decides a man's righteousness is this: Have you received Christ? The world's code erects a very different standard: Is a man honest, truthful, chaste, temperate, philanthropic? These virtues comprise the elements of worldly righteousness. Man, though a sinful being, has an influential moral nature, a nature collec-

tively influential; a nature capable of organising and applying the moral laws of a society, which the instincts of self-preservation teach men to enforce upon each other; but, let me add, a moral nature that has little personal influence over the individual. And this is the reason why merely human laws have proved so ineffectual a check to degeneracy. Still, the world has its gallery of virtues and its models of righteousness. And here and there will be found exemplary instances of goodness. Examples that win applause and command distinction, they become the patterns of moral excellence; and the youth of the world study from their conduct the illustrations of virtue. When the Spirit comes, He will convince the world that it must have another righteousness than this. He will refute the error that righteousness lies in the action, and not in the motive; in the apparent life, and not in that which is hidden; in the deed done, and not in the deed doing in the heart. He will remove the world's measure and index of goodness, and bring down from heaven the law of God, the law as expounded by Christ, Himself the lawgiver; and this law shall shut every man's mouth (Rom. iii. 19). The Holy Ghost displays the breadth of that law, its unapproachable holiness; demanding purity in the reins of a man's heart, and exacting equal obedience through every detail of obligation. He shall convince the world of its unrighteousness by placing in juxtaposition with the perfect law of the Lord the highest models of human virtue, and letting men see the awful disparity between that which satisfies them and that which is acceptable in His sight. In the presence of that law every man shall feel that he is guilty before God, whether he confesses it or not. But the Spirit stops not here: He fills men with despair, but He fills them also with

hope ; they despair of attaining righteousness ; they hope in God's mercy. He reveals the law, glorious in holiness, terrible in requirements : yet the manifestation is given not in the statutes of thou shalt, and thou shalt not, but in the person of Christ.

Here we have, not an abstract law engraven on stones or written in books, but a life ; a human life, for Christ was made like unto His brethren (Heb. ii. 17). This formidable law of God, which by itself appals us by its vast comprehensiveness, and makes us hide ourselves from its dread sanctity, is brought down into the life of a brother ; and we see it illustrated and magnified in human actions. Such a familiar embodiment of law makes it appear as if we could obey it ; there is a man obeying it : then surely all men ought to obey it. But as we draw nearer, and listen to the words, and mark the conduct of the Christ of God, the natural and intelligible forms of His obedience are lost in the infinite attributes of His character. Like the sky over our head, He is close at hand and infinitely remote. We look upon Him ; we are not terrified ; for there is something ineffably winning in the aspect of His purity ; full of law, but also full of love. We see a righteousness that makes us feel more bitterly our sin, that makes us look more despairingly upon our own efforts ; and yet it leaves in us a longing to be like Him, as if we ought to be as He is.

By the revelation of the Holy Ghost we see Him live, suffer, die, and revive ; and as we stand perplexed at what appears to be an anomalous mixture of innocence and pain, of perfect goodness and judicial severity, of weakness and strength, of life and death, of failure and triumph, the secret is suddenly unlocked for us, and we learn that the righteousness which we had been observing with admiration

and despair is ours as well as His ; that the benefit of it, the account of it, is reckoned to those who believe in Him ; that He lived not for Himself, but for us ; that this is the name by which He loves to be addressed by those who are convinced of sin, The Lord our righteousness (Jer. xxiii. 6) ; and that this acknowledgment on the part of the sinner delivers him from his sin. Does the Holy Ghost convince us that Christ is the Lord our righteousness ? How can His righteousness affect us in any other manner than as the force of an example ? Because all the way through it was dedicated to sinners : the whole life was lived that it might be placed to their account ; that they might have the benefit of the verdict of it. It was a strength that bore our weaknesses ; an intense and capacious sympathy that carried our sorrows ; a suffering that atoned for our guilt ; a life that revived our death ; a work in all its parts of teaching, obedience, suffering, expiation, and triumph, finished. "He shall convict the world of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more." The resurrection of Christ, and His magnificent and jubilant return to heaven, not in secret, but in the presence of His Church, and attended by the pomp of an angelic convoy, demonstrated the acceptance of His work. "I go to My Father an accepted sacrifice for the world ; ye see Me no more, a companion with you in tribulation, in the changeable relations of a visible friendship ; I go to accomplish the work of an invisible and unchangeable priesthood, and I will begin that work by praying the Father to give you another Comforter."

3. What is now the *decision* respecting all that has been done, or can be done, in the way of conviction of sin, and of righteousness ?

The Spirit shall declare this also unto the world : for He

shall convince men of *judgment*. He shall declare the end of all things: the end of faith, and the end of unbelief; the fate of an alien world, and the consummation of a redeemed Church. The Spirit shall convince the world of God's decisions. To judge is to separate a matter from debate or question: it then becomes a thing done with. It means, also, to pronounce judgment, either of condemnation or final approval; and such an action, whether of the mind or of a formal tribunal, is familiar to us all. The Spirit will set God's decisions against the judgments of men; and these judgments will be brought to naught, because the prince or leading spirit of them all is himself judged, is condemned, is separated or placed beyond the reconsideration of law or pity. The prince of this world is cast out; and those who continue in the world are condemned with him: those who persist in the sin of rejecting Christ, not because of their ignorance, but through the willing hardness of their hearts, those who decide and judge for themselves when a higher judgment is offered for their help, will be cast out with their prince beyond the pale of reconsideration and mercy. The Spirit shall reveal these deep truths both to the just and to the wicked. We may evade the conviction of sin and decline the gift of righteousness; but we can neither evade nor decline the judgment of God.

History furnishes an unanswerable demonstration of the wonderful words: "the prince of this world hath been judged." The Lord beheld his fall from heaven as lightning: having within His view the consummation as well as the beginning of that overthrow. Satan's kingdom has been doomed from the first. It was founded upon three doctrines: there is no God; there is no immortality; there is no moral obligation. The ancient nations that

built their life upon these doctrines have perished; the modern nations in which they exist as a dominant force are drifting upon new foundations. The convicting Spirit is at work upon their traditions, upon their literature, upon the minds of their leading thinkers. There is amongst them public opinion, a power unknown to their fathers, and increasing every year in volume and authority; an opinion largely inspired by Christian sentiment and enforced by the irresistible necessities of modern progress. All this is in the process of Christ's advancement: everything stands that supports Him; everything falls that opposes Him.



XII

## The Masses



## THE MASSES

Lift up thine eyes round about, and see : all they gather themselves together, they come to thee.

Therefore thy gates shall be open continually ; they shall not be shut day nor night.—Isa. lx. 4, 11.

THIS is the call of God to the Church. He speaks to her from the eminence of His omniscience. He sees everything within the circumference of the vast human race : all the forces within and around humanity. He sees the tendencies of great movements, and knows perfectly by what influences those movements can be further directed towards that consummation which, from the beginning, has been in His own mind, the redemption by Himself and the unity in Himself of all mankind. The Church which He addresses sees next to nothing : she sees nothing clearly, nothing connectedly. She looks upon the ground that is near her ; and within the contracted walk of her sight she may exercise the local functions of a daily ministry of instruction and charity. If she attempts to judge of anything beyond this minute survey, it is likely that her estimates will be erroneous, and her consequent action be irrelevant. There is nothing so necessary to be learned at the present time, and nothing so hard to learn, as the ignorance of the Church concerning the ways of God outside the narrow circles of her own operations. There is a striking example of this ignorance, and of the surprise which is the child of ignorance,

in the forty-ninth chapter of this book. The Church is represented as receiving an enormous accession of converts, during a season of intense discouragement, when there was not only no sign of prosperity, but an actual condition and surrounding of something very like desolation. She was talked down, and written down, and borne down by a variety of hostile forces, until her own children were ashamed of her and left her ; and the insolence of her enemies triumphed over a weakness which they could afford to despise. God was working for her, but she saw Him not ; and when, at His bidding, multitudes of worshippers flocked to her deserted sanctuaries, the astonished Church exclaimed, “Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and fro ? and who hath brought up these ? Behold, I was left alone ; these, where were they ?” (xlix. 21).

Let us place ourselves in the posture of listening to our omniscient Leader : who looks down from afar ; whose single glance commands every race upon the earth ; who not only knows, but directs every power which is now at work upon every mind, upon every association of minds, and upon the shape, actually attained or in process of attainment, of every event. May the spirit of hearing make us very silent, and the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord make us of quick understanding ! “Lift up thine eyes round about, and see”; place yourselves in a position superior to the little points of local observation by which your views have been narrowed ; exalt the sight and extend it, but make it circular —“round about.” The meaning is this : Resist the habit of looking in one direction only, which amounts to blindness respecting everywhere else ; and then, having commanded your survey, “see,”—that is, watch. Give prompt atten-

tion, but let the attention be strained, let it linger upon the objects that engage it. A hasty, surface look will deceive the beholder. There are multitudes afar and near: watch them; not to discriminate enemies from friends; not to call in and secure those who are in sympathy with you; not to find any agreement with what you yourselves have pre-conceived and pre-ordered. Watch the surrounding peoples as the heir of a property watches the estate which will soon be his. The reason that enforces a careful and prolonged outlook is the danger of confounding the direction of an initial movement with the ultimate bearing, mistaking a tributary for the main stream. Nothing is more common than the error of concluding that those who are pursuing another path than ours are following a different course. The course may be the same by a different route.

The Church is instructed to watch the multitudes surrounding her. "They gather themselves together, they come to thee." In interpreting a prophetic book, and especially Isaiah, the principle to be observed is that of finding out the scope of the prediction, and not attempting to expound every description and detail investing it. The Gentiles are gathered, or they gather themselves together, and they come to the Church. Two points stand out for consideration here: first, the gathering of these strangers and their pressing in the direction of the Church is not the result of any teaching or influence proceeding from the Church herself: they come to her, but she has not called them; she must open the gates of her fellowship and receive them. The second point is, that the multitudes who are moving towards the Church are not following a preconcerted resolution; they are drifting in the direction of the sanctuary as if they were obeying a destiny. They gather together

through various motives, intelligent or otherwise; they move as masses under one law. The gathering may be in groups, in organised associations, in classes, in nations. Men move in concert, sometimes to obtain a collective power to enable them to influence the State under which they are governed; sometimes for the mutual protection of their local privileges; sometimes for the discussion and advancement of learning, of science, of art. The organisations may be intelligent, direct, and worthy; they may be random and iniquitous while they last. The Church is commanded to open her eyes upon them and to observe them all: to let none escape the vigilance of her watch and the interest of her sympathy.

Let us obey this command, not in a spirit of dreamy musing, not with a wistful gaze, but with an attention careful, searching, practical, and conscientious. Look at the populations that lie nearest to us: they gather themselves together in groups, in organisations, in classes. There is everywhere a pervading restlessness, an impatient dissatisfaction with what is; an eagerness to attain new conditions. There is also, in some of the circles, the weariness and disgust that attend unsuccessful experiments: when everything has been tried and everything has failed—opinions, beliefs, adventures, connexions. The element of actual though unconscious despair is far more prevalent among all classes than we imagine. Then there is the concert of wretchedness, of destitution, of penury, where people are drawn together, not by a similarity of taste or a unity of aim, but by a similarity of misery; where, in the absence of intelligible motive, of moral restraint, of any uplifting force whatever, multitudes gravitate promiscuously, and sink into depths of infamous obscurity and woe.

Why are we commanded to open our eyes upon these, to watch and master the currents upon which they move, to let our sight linger on those forms of expression by which the multiform condition of this vast life is proclaimed? Because these countless strangers are coming to us, and we have to provide for their reception. They come to you: the Church, of which your communion is one of the gates, is their destined habitation. It matters not that they touch the extremes of race, of rank, of class, of mental and social condition; it matters not that they may have no knowledge of each other, no sympathy with each other, that not only traditions and usages, but the strongest antipathies, divide them as by impassable gulfs; they are one in the second and higher fatherhood of Christ. They are ignorant of each other, He knows them all; they may hate each other, He loves them all. He would have you look upon them with His eyes, and to claim them in His person. He has even made you His sponsors on their behalf; for He calls them your sons and your daughters, the worst and the most degraded of them. He will not have you select the desirable, the comely, the profitable; if you are ashamed of any of them and disown them, He insists that you shall disown and repudiate Him. If you will not have them, He will not have you. You must look upon them with a sense of kindred and of ownership; you must adopt their needs, their shame, and their woe.

If dishonour overtake a member of our own house, the shadow of it covers the home; by a narrow kind of justice we are acquitted of blame; but in spite of this verdict, we cannot get rid of the impression that we are in some way and in some degree responsible for it: we seem obliged to assume the guilt by mediation. The

reproaches by which our brother is reproached fall upon us. In this way, like the Master, we are “numbered with the transgressors.” That touching incident in the life of Jesus, where He wept over the guilty metropolis of His nation, belongs to the mediatorial sentiment which we are now enforcing. It illustrates the very highest form of humanity: a form unknown in history before the incarnation of the perfect Man. His tears flowed not from the common well of patriotism. He was not wedded to the soil of His native land; His love for His people was not quickened by the public admiration of His person, or the popularity of the cause He was striving to promote; the hosannas which were then, at the moment of His anguish, greeting His ears, expressed a temporary ebullition of gladness, but were destined to be changed in a few hours for the execrations of the Calvary mob, and had no other importance than bearing a typical relation to the ultimate consummation of His kingdom (Matt. xxi. 4, 5). “Oh that thou hadst known,” He exclaimed in the bitterness of His lament, “in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes” (Luke xix. 42). The city was doomed: but it was not the doom of its walls and structures that awakened this extraordinary sadness; it was the fall of a great and chosen people, whose matchless iniquities had at last conquered the forbearance of God; whose history proclaimed one great and continuous failure in apprehending days of visitation and opportunities of retrieval; whose annals had been adorned by the brightest minds that ever attempted to illumine a nation, statesmen and poets and philosophers, and, above all these, successive generations of prophets, in whom the prescience of the Deity was resident and made

manifest in guiding the affairs of the realm, in denouncing the corruptions of the times, in foretelling with infallible accuracy impending national disasters. But nothing availed to check the career of an appalling destiny. The last iniquity of which a people can be guilty is the murder of their counsellors, the men who are raised up to advise them ; and murder was the fate of those who dared to tell their country the truth. It was this particular form of wickedness that stirred the indignant sorrow of Christ : this is evident from a parallel invocation delivered at the close of a memorable impeachment : "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate " (Matt. xxiii. 37, 38). We hardly dare to look into the tumult of that infinite heart of defeated sympathy, patience, and love ! " How often would I have gathered thy children together " : referring not to the brief years of His incarnation, but to the lapse of their history, from the day when He called them in Abraham and renewed that call in Moses. " How often would I have gathered " : suggesting periods when all the conditions of a divine interposition were present, when nothing was wanting to make the season auspicious but the concurrence of those for whom the time was prepared. And He knew, at the moment when the city was spread before Him from the slope of Olivet, that they were about to fill up the measure of their fathers, by hounding Him to the cross.

He wept not for Himself, but for His people, not apart from them, but with them : theirs was the guilt, the misery, the infamy ; His the expiation of it all, in suffering, in

dishonour, in death. He wept not in the sullenness of disappointment or in the helpless abandonment of despair. He wept over the ravages of sin, and especially over that fruit of iniquity which affected Him most deeply, separation from God ; but He wept in hope, for He knew that the Cross, which would be the lowest infamy into which human guilt could descend, would be the returning point of the race : “ And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself ” (John xii. 32). All they would gather themselves together, they would come to Him : His sons would come from far, and His daughters from the ends of the earth ; then “ He would see of this travail of His soul, and be satisfied ” (Isa. liii. 11).

This is the spirit in which we must lift up our eyes round about from the mediatorial position upon which we stand, sorrowing in the sorrows of the multitudes that throng upon our sight, sharing their guilt and their humiliation by the sympathy of kindred, sacrificing ourselves in Christ for their redemption ; and with so firm a confidence in the result as to interpret all the diverse paths of their movements as lines converging upon the Church. They come to us, because they belong to us : the law of their attraction is not related to human taste ; it is an ordinance established in the councils of God. “ By Myself have I sworn, the word is gone forth from My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear ” (Isa. xlv. 23).

Let us now consider their reception by the Church. “ They come to thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually ; they shall not be shut day nor night.” We watch them coming : we must open all our gates : the gates that front every side of this city of refuge. We must

not open and shut, as if the hinges turned upon the demand and the satisfaction of scrutiny ; we must not have periods of closing and re-opening to accommodate seasons of rest : there must be no rest. The gates shall not be shut day nor night. But this does not mean that, having thrown wide all our doors, we may leave the pressing crowds to find their way through the portals as best they can. We are the door-keepers, not to present tests of admission, but to beckon the devious passers by to the entrance. They surround us, many of them in absolute ignorance of the retreat and salvation of which we are the appointed advertisers and guardians. More than this, if it were merely ignorance, they might be secured by a simple proclamation ; but the condition of their mind, wayward, bewildered, preoccupied, or perhaps blindly hostile, demands a personal ministry on the part of those who keep the doors ; a ministry of instruction, of winning invitation, eloquent in sympathy, irresistible in persuasion. The doorkeeper must not stand by the door ; he must mingle with the throng, study the arts of importunity, and compel them to come in.

Our great advantage is this : the temper of the people is restlessness, craving for satisfaction, for ease, for change of condition : they are driven by fears, by aspirations, by instincts which they understand not ; for the forces which agitate them are contradictory : some of them are in the beginning of life's struggle, full of strength and hope, commencing that terrible waste of power which is the unhappy commonplace of man's history ; others are closing the fight, beaten down and battered by failure, sick of life, and yet afraid to part with it : and underneath all is the impression, contended against, but hard to kill, that the grave has a farther side to it, that man

is not dust, that all is not settled by a last sleep, that another reckoning awaits us when life's present account is made up. I say this restlessness which we find is favourable to the glad tidings which we bring. Isaiah, who is as frequently the preacher as the prophet, made the condition of the people the argument of His message : "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" : urging that most telling consideration, " Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ?" (Isa. iv. 1, 2). And a greater preacher than Isaiah, Himself the bread, the milk, and the wine of the proclamation, in tones of inimitable tenderness and grace, appealed to the exhaustion and sufferings of a people ground down by the tyranny of their rulers : " Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28).

But while the need of the drifting throng must predispose them to listen to us and appreciate our labours, there is among them and in them One who makes this condition His grand instrument of convicting them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (John xvi. 8). The Holy Ghost is the chief minister of Christ : He is bound by no law, He follows no instructions ; He waits upon prayer, but He is independent of prayer : He bloweth where He listeth ; even those who watch His goings in the sanctuary cannot tell whence He cometh and whither He goeth. But this we know, He is the unseen leader of that drift of humanity which is pressing in the direction of the sanctuary. He is the invisible Shepherd of the world, driving the wandering and homeless sheep into the fold.

XIII

## Gospel Accommodation



## GOSPEL ACCOMMODATION

I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.—1 COR. ix. 22.

THIS is the doctrine of gospel accommodation which the Church has ever been slow to understand, and slower still to practise. The calling of the Church is to save. When she had nothing to keep, nothing to defend, nothing to divide or distract her energies from the business of her vocation, nothing to corrupt the singleness of her heart, she was “mighty to save”; and saving souls was the passion that dominated her councils and controlled and shaped her policy. When she grew in authority, in wealth, in schools and orders, and fenced herself round with creeds and dogma, her primitive position and her relation to the world were changed; she became a fortress for the defence of herself, instead of an open house of prayer and of refuge for all nations (Mark xi. 17). It is impossible to pursue a more melancholy reflection than that which is awakened by the present condition of the Church, regarding the Church as comprising all upon this earth who profess to call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. i. 2). The Roman, Greek, and Anglican Churches, and the innumerable Christian associations which surround these vast communities, in our present conception of the Church we include them all. Think for a moment of the intellect, the accomplishments, the

wealth, the literature, the power, possessed by the Church as thus defined, and then consider that the *raison d'être* of the Church's existence is the salvation of the world. I hesitate not to affirm that the stoutest argument that can be urged against the divine origin of the Church and of Christianity is the present condition of the world. As for scientific questionings on this subject, they are light as air. The objections to our faith which thoughtful men ponder are the appalling contrasts presented by its avowed mission and its actual work. I would not triumph over the Roman Church and say, "Stand thou there, for I am holier than thou!" I will not bring prophetic curses out of the Bible and hurl them at the Roman hierarchy; but as a student of religions and of nations, I will take the spirit and commands of the Christ and make them run parallel with the history of the Roman Church, and ask whether that history was intended by the great Shepherd to be the progressive evolution of the memorable announcement, "I know My sheep, and am known of Mine" (John x. 14)? and whether the genius of Roman propagandism has been inspired by the broad and infinitely comprehending love of that kindred proclamation, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock, and one Shepherd" (John x. 16)? I will ask, moreover, whether the position of the supreme ecclesiastic of Rome is the pure growth of a New Testament seed? Can we find the origin of it in any of Christ's delegations? does it not directly traverse the Master's teaching? "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you" (Matt. xx. 25, 26). "Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father,

which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters : for one is your Master, even Christ; all ye are brethren" (Matt. xxiii. 8-10). I will yet ask whether the traditions of the Roman Sanctuary, the ritual of its worship, and the manner and substance of its teaching, were in the mind of Christ as the developed image of the Church, when He sent out His first followers to disciple all nations? Can any thoughtful student, of whatever school, imagine for a moment that the ecclesiastical system of Rome, as exhibited in later centuries, and as it stands to-day, reflects the genius and the pattern of the New Testament?

I must explain here that I do not take Rome for my illustration because there happens to be among Protestants a conventional repudiation of her policy. I am pursuing no scheme of polemical and party condemnation. I select the great Latin Church because her history carries us back to the cradle days of our faith; and from Rome we ought to expect an authentic Christianity. If the priesthood, the ritual, and the labours of Rome comprise an authentic Christianity, it only remains for me to say that the gospel which it authenticates has come from another source than the writings of the New Testament. I am not unmindful of the debt which letters, civilisation, and religion owe to many of the fathers and teachers of Rome, but these were solitary lights that burned far apart in the vast sepulchre of a dead Church. It may be that God will raise the dead, that the breath of omnipotence will sweep through the charnel-house of Rome; I am not at present concerned with the future of fallen Churches, but with the causes of their declension; and these causes convey a lesson which more than any other it is necessary for us just now to study. The lesson is this: The maintenance of fixed doctrines on

behalf of the gospel, the sacrifice of separating conditions on behalf of the world. The centre of the apostle's position as a christian and as a minister was immovable, he was under the law to Christ. He drew his law from Christ; whatever there is in law, of command, of restraint, of counsel, of inspiration, he received through his personal fellowship with the Son of God. Fellowship with Christ was his law, his ten commandments, his ritual, and contained all the principles of his Church system; from this fellowship he looked out upon men, and the supreme labour of his life was to bring them to Christ; or, to adopt his own expression, to "save" them. The conviction that out of Christ, or away from Christ, they were lost, was not an opinion, "the entertainment which his mind gave to a proposition, as something likely to be true, without certain knowledge that it is true." It prevailed within him as the certainty of experience; and it not only caught and reflected the vivid colours and contrasts of his own life, but by a heavenly illumination it embraced and brought into his consciousness the perishing of races. He was a learned man and a student of men; and incidental passages in his writings afford ample proof of the minuteness and accuracy of his discrimination of human conditions. But as seen out of Christ, it mattered not who they were, in St. Paul's view all divisions and orders disappeared, they were perishing sinners. The question that preceded considerations of agency, the question that governed policy and determined experiment, was this, How can they be saved? He never allowed this question to be burdened by tradition; it was never permitted to yoke itself with, and to have its pace regulated by, precedent, authority, or usage. The sinner is lost; how can we save him? His salvation must not wait upon method, but must itself determine

method. And here comes in the discrimination of human conditions. All are perishing ; this fact is not affected by the divisions of race and rank. "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians ; both to the wise, and to the unwise" (Rom. i. 14). They must be reached, not in the sense of sending to them a gospel proclamation, which they may or may not understand ; not in the sense of offering them a chance of salvation by establishing amongst them institutions of teaching ; they must be reached. They may flee from the messenger through misapprehension, through repugnance, through some stress of preoccupation. He must pursue them, and exhaust all the arts of winning which he knows to capture them for Christ. Paul's master method of saving men was to address them from their own position : "To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak." He must gain the weak at any cost. Here is the deliberate effacement of himself. He was strong in mind, in learning, in speech, in opinion, in self-respect, in reputation. These features of his character had been elaborated with care ; they constituted himself, Saul of Tarsus and Damascus, Paul of Antioch and Ephesus. But where this lofty personality obstructed his access to the weak, the narrow, and the timid ; where it stood in the way of his message, shutting up the heart of those to whom he was sent, he counted it loss for Christ, sacrificed it without a murmur, and gloried in the stigma and brand of no reputation, if by this or by any means he might save a soul from death.

To this spirit of accommodation the Church has not been faithful. She has never wanted personal examples of it ; these, by a happy rebellion against the rigidity of orders and the authority of ritual, leaped their ecclesiastical inclosures,

and asserted their obligation and freedom as evangelists and missionaries to the race. If in some instances they were afterwards supported by the counsels of their rulers, it was only when the success of their irregular work was too conspicuous and too genuine to permit a continuance of the censure it had provoked, or of the apathy which had discouraged it. But the Church was not in it: it was not the offspring of her policy. She had her eye upon the world, but it was the eye of power, not of love. There was no tenderness in it: no tears fell over lost souls. To the weak she was insolently and repellently strong; to the Jew she assumed without warrant the avenger of the Crucified One, and hurled her anathemas against the entire race. To them that were without law, her conclaves, synods, and courts bristled with law; them that were under law, any other law than that which she ordained, she claimed the liberty to judge as transgressors; and if bribery and intimidation failed to exact submission and conformity, she added to her judicial functions the darker business of the executioner. She was a light in the world, but not the light of the world. She was the custodian of the word of God, and she kept the deposit too well, for she did nothing with it but keep it. Everything depended upon the diffusion of that word; the isles were waiting for it, and they waited in vain. It contained within itself the life, the genius of humanity; it was the message of God to His fallen children; it announced that in Christ He had reconciled them unto Himself (2 Cor. v. 19). The Church was called and constituted to make this known to every nation and kindred and people and tongue (Matt. xxviii. 19). But instead of proclaiming it from and to the various conditions in which she found the world, instead of rising to the sublimity of her

angelic calling, and having the everlasting gospel flying in the midst of heaven and preaching it, filling the languages of the earth with the news, she located and travestied the expression of it in artistic and processional symbols to catch a popular and spurious veneration for herself. She did everything but preach it, everything but make it known ; everything but what a Church is raised up to do : and now it has come to pass that the history of the Church herself is supposed to be the strongest weapon of the enemies of Christ. The countries of Asia Minor and Northern Africa are vast sepulchre lands of buried Churches. The victories of Mohammed were the judgments of Christ upon Christian congregations and powers that had a name to live, but were dead ; and He permitted the Mohammedans to bury them.

It may be supposed that in this description I have had in my mind the history of one Church organisation ; but if some of the reminiscences of our account have been furnished by Rome, I include the Eastern with the Western hierarchy, and the purport of the review is to bring out in the largest and clearest characters the one fact that the Church is answerable for the condition of the world. She is responsible for the Mohammedan occupation of Lesser Asia and of Northern and Central Africa ; she is responsible for the arrest of missionary progress on the western coast of India ; she is to be charged with the high and fatal misdemeanour of forgetting that the world was not created for her, but she for the world. She was sent forth from Jerusalem to save mankind ; to clothe herself with every art which love and sympathy, never wanting in skill, could invent, to make Jesus acceptable to the races which He had redeemed. She was endowed with the amplest preparation ; she commanded

an infinite treasury of evidence, she could draw inspiration from a glorious bead-roll of fathers, a noble army of prophets, apostles, and martyrs ; she possessed the infallible oracles of Sinai illumined by the teaching of the Son of God and the commentaries of the first preachers of the Cross ; and, above all, there rested upon her, as an indefeasible heritage, the priceless anointing of the Holy Ghost. If these mighty powers and talents had been consecrated to the diffusion of the gospel, to the winning of souls for Christ, there would not by this time have been left one alien faith !

As an illustration of the character of this universal fall from her heavenly calling to save the world, take the condition of the Anglican division of the Church at the time of the Reformation. There is a certain order of churchmen who disparage and even discredit that illustrious revival of intellectual freedom, that awakening of conscience and responsibility from the slumber of centuries ; but at present we are not concerned with the disguised Papists of the Church of England. The Reformation was the salvation of Europe, and I introduce it here to point out the remarkable circumstance that the missionary genius of the gospel hardly finds a place in the new theology of that transcendent controversy. Of course the special doctrines, biblical, ecclesiastical, and political, upon which the polemics of the time hinged, demanded immediate consideration and settlement ; around these urgent questions controversy raged. But when the Protestant movement was crowned with triumph, and the liberated Churches were free to reconstruct their working institutions, and to develop their learning, there was no provision for the propagation of the gospel outside Christendom ; there was no serious discussion of the state of the heathen world. The pagan races were quietly

handed over to the judgments of God, and interred in the mysteries of predestination. Even in the musings and prayers of the saints, treasured in the devotional literature of this and the subsequent period, a literature unusually rich in the breathings of subjective piety, there is scarcely a reference to the heathen except in pharisaic congratulation ; there is no prayer like this, “Lord, save the world !” Those who are acquainted with the latter part of the seventeenth and with the eighteenth century, will remember how slowly the missionary idea arose upon the mind of the Churches, and with how much difficulty it advanced to a practical shape. And when at last the work was undertaken, it was regarded as an eccentric and doubtful charity. It might almost be said, that the organisation of missions to non-Christian races is a modern institution !

It would seem by the strain of these reflections, as if I were insisting upon the claims of foreign missions. That is not my purpose in any respect whatever. I have intended to show to what a condition the Church was reduced when she allowed the reason of her existence to sink out of sight ; when to save souls from death, and to hide and bury the sins of the world, became her secondary calling, a calling which she could safely subordinate to the maintenance of her priesthood, her dogmas, and the administration of her endowments. Methodism sprang from the inversion of these vocations. Mr. Wesley came from a Church whose motto might have been this : Save souls if you can, but keep the institutions and ritual of the priesthood intact. Our founder amended the motto of his Anglican fathers : Keep the institutions and ritual of the priesthood intact, if you can, but save souls. Every question, every tradition, every usage in early Methodism

was made to yield to the imperial duty of saving men. This was the star of Wesley's navigation in new waters. He and his preachers fixed their eye only upon this light ; they determined their course by it ; they grounded all their calculations upon it ; they knew not what lay before them,—the rupture of old friendships, the surrender of old positions, the embarrassment of novel situations, the issues to which their work would lead them, the dimensions to which it would grow ; each man might himself forecast any one of these possible results, but they did not forecast them together and deliberate upon them in their Conferences.

Saving the souls of the people was the one work for which they lived and died. This was a key that fitted all doors of entrance ; it was also their warrant for entering all passages. They saw masses around them without hope and without God in the world ; they had the most vivid conception of what that spiritual orphanage meant ; they themselves had been lifted by the Everlasting arms from the dark and horrible pit of this desolation ; the miseries of the captivity and the unspeakable gladness of the redemption were the facts of their personal history, and they ran about proclaiming that history : “Come and hear, and I will tell you what God hath done for my soul” (Ps. lxvi. 16). The possibility of every man’s salvation, the right of every man to hear the glad tidings, the tremendous personal issues involved in the acceptance or rejection of God’s offer, were not with Wesley and his preachers mere doctrines upon which a bishop or a Conference might examine them ; they were truths burned into their soul ; and they must declare them or die. And when to this is added the glorious fact that wherever they preached, in street, highway, and field ; in cottage, yard, and barn ; showers of converting influence,

so long absent from the Church, returned with the old copiousness of Pentecost, and multitudes were added to the Lord, we cannot be surprised that the ancient obligations of Church order sat very lightly indeed upon these modern apostles. We must excuse the half contempt with which they regarded ecclesiastical restrictions. We may set down to their ignorance or to their fanaticism the light manner in which they passed by the councils, precedents, and decisions of intervening centuries, and selected as their model of procedure the *Acts of the Apostles*. The secret of their success was the conditional sympathy in which they placed themselves with the people; and this must still be the prevailing method of winning souls. Nay, let me not use that word “method,” as if the sympathy and tenderness of love were the well-ordered provisions of a scheme. It is not so much method we want as inspiration.

We have been applauding St. Paul’s self-effacement in the sacrifices and labours of his shining ministry. Where did he obtain that enthusiasm which made him unconscious of his personality? He drew it from the Cross. After himself obtaining salvation by looking upon the divine Victim, he remained as it were standing at the Cross, and became a profound student of the crucifixion. It was the centre of the apostle’s theology, the resting-place of the faith of his gospel, and the wellspring of his passionate affection for Jesus, “who loved me, and gave Himself up for me” (*Gal. ii. 20*). He emulated the abandonment of the Cross, an undivided offering for the world; he lost himself in the comprehension of the Cross; he saw that it drew in and absorbed everything, the sins, the woes, the sicknesses, the despair of the groaning creation, and changed them into an infinite wealth of benediction. He would be crucified with Christ, an un-

divided offering of service and suffering for the salvation of men ; he, following in the steps of his Master, would receive upon himself the conditions of other men, charge himself with their weaknesses, necessities, and disadvantages, and give them in exchange the hope, the strength, and the elevation of the Christ. He would be all things to all men, that he might by all means save some. This is our great Easter lesson ; it is addressed to us from the Cross : “To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak.” The words are Paul’s, the thing itself is Christ’s ; and it must become ours.

XIV

Mighty to Save



## “MIGHTY TO SAVE”

Mighty to save.—Isa. lxiii. 1.

THERE need be no question that this passage is a description of the victories and the exulting ascendancy of the Son of God. The verses in their particular imagery admit of great latitude of exposition, and it matters not to what events and to what date you apply the mere costume of the prophecy ; but the chief ideas of the description are as defined and as unchangeable as history.

First, there is a conflict in which Christ is single-handed against His enemies : all against one. Of the people, that is, of His own people, there was none with Him ; not one to help Him, to uphold Him. He had reason to look for their help ; He wondered to find Himself alone ; but alone, notwithstanding, His single arm was more than equal to the fight ; for,

Secondly, there is a conquest so universal and complete that He not only smote His enemies, but brought their strength to the earth and trampled upon them ; and when the battle was over, He suffered not the slightest exhaustion, but travelled home “in the greatness of His strength.” Mighty to destroy, He became “mighty to save.”

Thirdly, the day of Christ’s taking vengeance on His enemies was in the year of His redeemed, the year or time

in which He had promised to march out for the deliverance of His people. He came not before the time, He came not after. The day of vengeance was in His mind, had long been in His mind, and the destruction of His enemies slumbered not a moment after the date of that day had arrived. Here, then, are three events:

1. Christ's single-handed fight, in which He expected His people to join Him, but really did not need them.
2. Christ's annihilating conquest, treading all His enemies down, and making them His footstool.
3. Christ's everlasting deliverance of His people taking place at a particular time, predetermined by Himself.

It will not be difficult for us to find transactions corresponding more or less exactly with these events in the past history of the Church; but the prophecy has only become partially historical, the realisation of its brightest features is prophetic still. It is not my purpose, however, in this address to speculate in guesses and probabilities upon the unfulfilled residue of the text, to attempt to read God's chronology in the signs of the times, or to venture at all into regions of visionary thought. I will limit myself to literal facts.

1. Christ is abroad single-handed destroying His enemies. When I say single-handed, I mean that the effectual blow is dealt by Himself alone. We are with Him, but more as spectators than fellow-soldiers; for sometimes we have simply to "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exod. xiv. 13). But He would have us share more deeply in the conflict, if not always with our arm, always with our sympathy and prayer. We may gather from the pathetic reproach, "I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold," that the zeal or

courage of His followers has sometimes flagged, and that in the hot convulsions of the engagement they have abandoned their Leader.

These words have sometimes been understood to refer to Christ's redeeming work, in which it was impossible He should have a companion ; for no other atonement than the sacrifice of His own life was equal to the task, and no other was needed. Yet none knew this so well as Christ Himself ; and, conscious that in Him alone dwelt the sufficiency of atoning and saving power, He could never have looked for another redeemer, or wondered that no arm but His own was available for the rescue of the world. We may perhaps lawfully employ the words, "I have trodden the winepress alone ; and of the people there was none with Me," to express the solitary sufferings and conflict of Jesus, when the Lord "laid upon Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. liii. 6) ; but the description finds a more accurate original in the achievements of our Leader at the head of a disheartened and embarrassed Church. "Of the people there was none with Me." He had a people, redeemed, saved, and led by Himself ; but in the battle of Edom they were not with Him. The historic reference to Edom is explained by the fact that when the kingdom of Israel began to decline, the Edomites reconquered their lost cities, and, uniting with the Chaldæans against the Jews, they advanced westward, occupied the whole territory of their brethren the Amalekites, and even took possession of many towns, including Hebron. The Edomites were therefore denounced by the later prophets. The prophecy relating to the destruction of the Edomites is a favourite study with the Jews to this day ; and Edom is their cryptograph, their hidden word, for Rome and all their enemies.

There is to us an impenetrable Edom into which the Lord has gone alone, and in which He is contending and destroying alone. There are possessions in heathenism, in popery, and in infidelity, which we have never approached, have never seen, have never heard of. To us they are mysteries ; we attack them very much in the dark. Like the army of Israel surrounding Edom, we may camp on the outskirts of these illimitable districts of error ; but who can scale their heights ? who can plunge into their ravines ? who can track their byways and explore their secret places ? The direct impression of the Christian Church upon heathenism would be too insignificant for computation were it not that the Lord is in the midst of it, preparing the way for the advancement of His followers. When we obtain an easy victory, when some stronghold suddenly and unexpectedly falls before us, it is explained by a preliminary surrender, resulting from the action of the Lord Himself in the absence of His Church ; of the people there was none with Him. In the study of missionary work in this country and in other lands, I have been impressed by this most significant fact, that the events which have given to the Church her openings and great opportunities have not been in any sense the work of the Church ; nay, they have been sometimes produced by the enemies of the Church. The forces that accomplished them have been passive agents in the hands of Him who worketh in all things according to His own will.

But if Christ is accomplishing so much without us, what is He doing through us ? I am sorry to confess that our temper and resolution are not those of men who intend to possess the world. There is a hesitating spirit in the theology and administration of the Churches, there is an

indifference, at least a languor, on the capital question of Christ's right to the world, and on the means of making that right good, which is far beneath the missionary genius of the gospel. He may well look for help, and wonder that there are so few to uphold Him. But if we are cold, He is in earnest. If we cry, "A little more folding of the hands" (Prov. vi. 10), He says, "How am I straitened until My purpose be accomplished!" (Luke xii. 50.) Whether we are with Him or not, His arm is never still, never weary. His fury, rather, perhaps, His weapons uphold Him; and He makes everything a weapon when He wishes to destroy; and everything a deliverer when He wishes to save. While, on the one hand, we are called by every motive of duty and love to hasten to His help, on the other hand, with an omnipresent Christ, the leader of armies who oppose Him, as well as of those who follow Him, who is marching through the world crying in every language and in every event, "All souls are Mine" (Ezek. xviii. 4), we cannot despair of seeing the world at His feet.

We will not concern ourselves as to the manner in which Christ overthrows our adversaries; we will not seek the precise interpretation of particular occurrences; we will not waste time in disputing between ourselves in what respect Christ is here or there: for I think you will agree with me that our business just now is rather preaching Christ, and living Christ, than disputing about Him. It seems to me that we are called not so much to fight for Christ, as to proclaim Christ. We may leave enemies and hostile movements for Him to destroy or counteract: let us go to those who know Him not; a much larger number than those who are opposing Him; let us go to the scattered sheep, and guide or bear them home to the fold; and

leave Him to deal with the wolves; and remember this one thing, when He destroys, He destroys utterly: "I will tread them in Mine anger, and trample them in My fury."

Having shown that Jesus is outside the Churches destroying His enemies, let us come nearer home and point out that He is in the midst of His redeemed, mighty to save. "The year of My redeemed is come." His redeemed, His own redeemed; whose souls He purchased with His life, and whom therefore He loves as His life. But He has redeemed every human being; and therefore He loves every human being. When God loved us, He loved us all; and would "have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. ii. 4). But to perceive and feel the force of this wonderful truth, let us, for the present, narrow our view from a redeemed world to a redeemed company assembled in this house, this hour. Let us lay it down as an unassailable fact that we are redeemed. Let every one, whatever may be his spiritual condition, appropriate the truth, and repeat to his own heart the confession, I am redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

Here then we all of us appear in the divine presence, with Christ in the midst of us, mighty to save: mighty to rescue from any and every alien power. "Mighty to save" means more than able to save. It is not the abstract power of Christ which we must here consider. If it were a question of mere capacity, we might dismiss it at once by conceding the inference that since the Son of God is omnipotent, no task is impossible to Him. Look for a moment by way of illustration to human capacity. When you say a man is capable of performing a certain work, you mean that in your mind you have put the man

and the work together, and that the requirements of the work are answered by the talents of the man. But although, looking at his fitness for the task as a question of mere capacity, he may have all that is needful, there are several circumstances which affect that capacity; circumstances that may diminish it to incompetency, or increase it a hundredfold. Is he willing to do it? does he purpose to do it? and if so, is that purpose supported by great motives—interest, or passion, or personal honour, or life? And, lastly, are surrounding events, which in estimating capacity must always be taken into the account, favourable to the execution of the scheme? You have observed, perhaps, that within the measure of abstract ability, the elements of power are two, passion and resolution; and that in most instances of contrast, the predominance of these elements makes the difference between one man and another. I have seen a weak body perform wonderful feats of strength, because the will, sustained by passion, never surrendered. I have seen a strong frame reduced to infant weakness, because the mind was hesitating in purpose. I have seen mediocrity by invincible application attain the results of genius, and genius by irresolution fall to the level of mediocrity. I have seen a great capacity, animated by passion, directed by resolution, and sustained by the strongest motives, fail in accomplishing its object, because the season of the attempt was unpropitious.

Now in Christ all these circumstances which make capacity available and irresistible are present. He is able to save, as a mere question of ability. No one doubts that. But He is willing to save. Will is a great step in advance of mere power. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the

wicked turn from his way and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die ?" (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) A passage like this discloses to us the heart of God ; and we should expect such a declaration from one whom every work of His declares to be " slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy " (Ps. ciii. 8). God is not only able to save us from death, but He desires, He wills, that every one of us should live. He loves the life which He has made ; He is happy in the happiness He has awakened. He has lavished His wonderful invention to provide even for the fugitive bliss of the animal world. The earth is full of His riches. " Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing " (Ps. cxlv. 16). He loves creation as a Maker, because it reflects the idea of His mind ; and He hates and would put away everything which mars that idea. But He loves man as a father loves his child. The Scriptures are full of addresses that portray the various changes of the parental temper,—tenderness, solicitude, reproof, forgiveness, warning, promise, every shape that the unquenchable yearning of a father can assume. Christ, who with the Father is our father, for the Triune God is the father of man,—Christ, I say, is mighty to save, because He delights to save ; and I call upon every one of the unsaved, and especially upon any one whose state may be supposed by himself to be too desperate for hope, I call upon him, sitting it may be in the sullenness of despair, to acknowledge to himself that Christ desires his salvation. I demand from him the concession that his unhappy condition is counter to the will and nature of Christ.

2. He is mighty to save because it is His purpose to save. We have spoken of His mere capacity, omnipotence, of His nature, love ; we must now dwell upon His design. We

have to consider power, love, and will under the pressure of an engagement.

And here the whole gospel rises before us : its preparation in the eternal Mind ; its gifts, its elections, its issues, all preordained, until, in the fulness of time, Christ stands upon the earth ; born to save ; preaching to save ; suffering and dying to save ; rising to save ; calling apostles, planting a Church, filling that Church with the Holy Ghost, to save ; ascending to the holiest office of the priesthood to save, yea, to the uttermost, all "that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. vii. 25).

Consider, I beseech you, that Jesus is bent upon deliverance, He is urged by His love for our souls, or He had never become obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross. His honour is committed to the task ; He has pledged His word, even to the solemn formality of a personal oath, to save the soul that trusts in Him ; nay, more, to help a soul to trust in Him ; to seek it out and lead the wanderer home ; to minister by gracious illuminations and inducements to the convictions and impressions of every enquirer. He does not sit at home and wait until we come to Him : He comes to us ; draws us by His Spirit ; prepares by the opportunities of His providence ; instructs by the ordinances of His Church ; sometimes winning by gentleness, sometimes compelling by chastisement, but always aiming to deliver us. We are chosen to salvation : it is the work of His choice to save ; it is the execution of His covenant to save ; it is the longing of His heart to save. All His marvellous attributes, to the glory of which this fair and vast creation is an inadequate testimony, are consecrated to the service of sinners.

But this salvation is not mere rescue. Reconciliation is

not simply the healing of a breach. The reunion with God effected by the sacrifice of Jesus is the commencement of a new life which grows into the image of Christ. That new life is gentle, weak, and surrounded by many perils, like all life that is new. It does not advance inevitably, but conditionally. There is a law of passion threatening to extinguish it ; there is a law of righteousness whose high standard discourages and depresses it : and between these two laws, our faith, our purposes, our very prayers, are only kept alive by a perpetual struggle ; and if Jesus is out of sight even for a moment, they seem to fail altogether ; it is as if we had never believed, had never purposed, had never prayed. We seem to fall back into the bondage from which we had been delivered, to be once more slaves to the tyranny of sin.

But here speaks the mighty voice of Jesus : "Sin shall not have dominion over you. Sin was your king once ; I am your King now. When sin had to reckon with you only, your resistance was a vanity, a mockery. Sin has to reckon with Me now. It may tempt you ; it may embitter some moments of your life ; but its dominion is gone, gone for ever ! Ye are not under the law, which gives provocation and strength to sin, but under grace ; and where sin abounded in condemnation and shame, grace, My grace, abounds much more in forgiveness and holiness" (Rom. vi. 14). So speaks Christ in righteousness, mighty to save. Let me repeat that He comes to-day not to effect a mere rescue, but to accomplish a full salvation ; not only to break the dominion of sin, but to bring you under the majesty of His personal reign, His undivided sway. There will be conflict still ; but the entire field of the fight is changed. In the battles of the past there was only one

record, defeat. Your feeblest enemy was too strong for you. But now, the battle is the Lord's. Let this be your motto—"The battle is the Lord's." It is not merely that He sympathises with you in the contest, that He instructs you how to handle the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith: but the conflict is His; His is the valour, the skill, the resource, and the responsibility of the fight. Remember this when you are hard pressed by passion, by scepticism, by the solicitations and craft of evil, by an irritating impatience to see questions answered and problems unravelled which are impossible of solution. Remember this, and difficulties will vanish, enemies will be turned to flight, and you will be more than conquerors.



XV

## The Faithful Saying



## THE FAITHFUL SAYING

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.—1 TIM. i. 15.

HERE is a saying or statement affirmed to be true, and to have claims to universal acceptance. Before we consider these claims, I shall explain briefly what is included in the statement itself. This part of the task will not be difficult. The language is unquestionably clear; and as for the declaration, those points in it which we shall have to recall and consider are intelligible ideas, about which there can be no division of opinion.

I am not now to speak of the truth or untruth of the saying, but of what the saying itself affirms. Let me premise, however, that the declaration is limited to a statement of the gospel or glad tidings of Christianity, nothing more and nothing less.

There are parts of the Christian scheme which cannot be understood by all; there are other parts concerning which there is room and permission for the divergence of men's opinions. But the saying of the text belongs not to these. It is affirmed of this saying, in effect, that there must not be, because God has arranged that there should not be, any abiding doubt or difference of judgment respecting it. As it is the essential truth of His religion, God has prepared the expression of it for the admission of every one who hears

it. Bearing in mind that it is alleged of this statement that it contains nothing which can be fairly rejected, or at which any order of mind need stumble, let us carefully examine the several clauses of it.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

1. The pre-existence of Christ is assumed. He came into the world ; not in the sense of being born into the world as other men. Whatever the words may be construed to mean, St. Paul gives the teaching of the New Testament as authorised by the great Teacher Himself, whose declarations of His pre-existence are equally clear and specific.

The saying before us does not express the rank of Christ Jesus before His incarnation ; but that rank is implied in the form in which His advent is described. It is not, Christ Jesus was sent to save sinners ; He came. It is true, and is stated, that God gave and sent His Son. But if you assume for a moment that Christ was simply a creature and minister of God, you will perceive that there is an inaccuracy in the form, “He came to save sinners.” St. Paul does not always write with precision as to language ; always as to thought. In the torrent of his inspired style there are half expressions, never half thoughts : in his sublimest mood there is no dreaminess of musing, as if the writer were himself not sure of the basis of his teaching. But the statement we are studying supposes in the form of it the extremest accuracy of language as well as of thought ; there is about it an economy of words that belongs to the formulas of axioms. Truths that cannot be disputed, that only require for their instant admission the complement of our faculties, are expressed with the severest simplicity ; they are the data of our reasoning : they are like tools made to be fitted to the hand and only intended for work. As if the

truth of the gospel had the indisputable authority of a self-evident proposition, St. Paul gives it an axiomatic form. As if it ought not to be questioned, cannot be questioned, but must be made the ground or accepted starting-point of other and remoter truths. We conclude, therefore, that every word of this saying has been weighed in the exactest balance of the judgment. He came to save sinners is only accurate as a statement when it means that God came to save them (Phil. ii. 5).

2. The nature of sin is implied. He came to save men who have sinned. The form to "save sinners" occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. St. Paul might have borrowed our Lord's own words and inserted them, "to save the lost." But while the word "lost" has an exquisite fitness in the passage, "the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost," it would have wanted precision and comprehensiveness in a statement designed to embody the entire gospel. Where the words are so few, every particle must be exact. "Christ Jesus came to save sinners." There are certain phrases among us that describe the classes of the evil conditioned of the world—the uneducated, the immoral, the uncivilised, the unfortunate, etc. We must not be afraid to use the truer description of the text, *sinners*. We have sinned, we have missed the right mark; we have diverged from the right path. The glory of the God who made us is the true mark of human life; the knowledge of Him in view of ultimate communion with Him is the true path of the mind. Those who affirm that man has never fallen from God, that in the beginning we were morally and intellectually lower than we now are, must explain two things: (1) the traditions of all countries that have traditions, recalling a purer age, a purer teaching, a purer life in

the olden time ; and (2) the high state of intellectual refinement attained by the nations of the world three thousand years ago, as witnessed by their surviving literature : upon which literature, I may add, we have made no advancement in those arts of thinking and expression that more than anything else attest intellectual power. And those features of the human character and the human life in which we have gone beyond our ancestors, namely, in purity, in breadth of sympathy, and in enlightened personal freedom, we owe to the religion that convinces us of sin. We are guilty before God. You can make that personal charge against any of the sons of earth, whatever be his faith ; and his accusing thoughts will admit the charge. Go where you may, you find the impression of a broken law and a coming wrath.

Connect the word “ save ” with “ sinners,” and you have at once the condition of the sinner : the expression is not, to teach sinners, to enlighten them, to improve them ; it is not that they are simply dark and ignorant and wicked ; they are in a state of progressive ruin, for which there is no remedy in themselves. One therefore comes to them : He is not raised up from among them : He finds them hopelessly disorganised ; nay, condemned to scattering and weakness and misery, the penal as well as the natural result of their criminal alienation from God. He comes to save them. He comes, because none else can save : could a doctrine have saved them, He might have sent them a doctrine ; an angel might have delivered a message ; or one of themselves might have been inspired with a higher wisdom, if any abstract knowledge could have helped them. But salvation must come in the Person and by the sacrificial exertions of the Son of God. He Himself declares that He saves by the offering up of His

own life: whatever construction we may put upon His words, He affirms everywhere that the offering of His blood was the means by which God would be reconciled to men, and the worship of the Father re-established in the earth; and so all His apostles with singular agreement explain after Him. Thus we have expressions like these: "This is My blood of the covenant which is shed for many unto the remission of sins" (Matt. xxvi. 28). "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). "The Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts xx. 28). "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8). "Much more then, being justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. v. 9). The strength of this language, describing a remedy that fills us with awe as we think of the cost of it, suits the expression "save." Christ was an incomparable teacher, an inimitable example, but to the action of this part of His career we could hardly apply the description saving, rescuing, delivering. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. i. 21).

We have now examined the clauses of this saying; we have marked the severe and accurate simplicity of the language, and the perfect completeness of the statement, as if it had the undisputed clearness and authority of an axiom. And has it not? To many of us it has: its truth is so instantly apparent, that we can hardly regard it as other than a self-evident proposition; and we came to the knowledge of it very much after the manner in which first truths are made known to us. We do not reason ourselves into these primary facts; they are the fixed impressions of our common sense. Whether they arise in the mind originally,

or whether they are brought to the mind, they carry their own evidence with them: we rather feel their truth, than apprehend it by an act of the perception. It is, of course, possible that in the case of some of us there were initial processes of observation and comparison; but now the work is done, and the revelation complete, we are hardly able to mark their place in the history of our experience. We did not reason ourselves into a conviction of sin: we woke up to it; the fact struck us like a sudden ray. There was no doubt of it; for as no one reasoned us into it, no one could have reasoned us out of it. There we were, self-condemned, and we knew we were God-condemned. We needed no argument to prove that we were wicked, and that the fault was ours. Of one thing we were satisfied, that our condemnation was just; and yet, strange to say, we also knew that our condition was helpless. The union of these two feelings, familiar to the knowledge of all Christians, is yet remarkable when looked at by themselves. A just condemnation supposes the residence of a power of personal help. The violation of a covenant that ought to have been honoured is in the very nature of sin; and yet the sinner feels there was no power in himself to prevent it, and no power yet available to repair it. We could not explain or reconcile these things; we only cried out, like an ailing child, What shall I do? Then we heard the saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

I appeal to all who have accepted this glorious statement for themselves, whether it was not made known to them more as the impression of a self-evident truth than as the conclusion of an argument. Some of you were cultivated in mind before the arrival of your faith in Christ; your habits were intellectual; you observed, you read the observations of others,

you weighed statements, you reasoned upon facts, you deduced other facts, you separated the false from the true, the essential from the adventitious ; and yet you never accepted Christ in this manner. Christ flashed upon you like a primary belief, and, cultured as you were in the arts of analysis and expression, you would have been puzzled in answering the question, How was it done ? and could only have relieved the embarrassment of ignorance by exclaiming, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John ix. 25). How is it that in this knowledge only, all are on the same level ? Because it is really a primary, and therefore a universal truth. It is a truth inseparable from our nature. It is no answer to say there are men who do not understand it. There are tribes in the earth so low in mind that you would find it hard to make them understand that two and two are four, and, the whole is greater than its part. Even the axioms of knowledge can only be known by giving attention to the natural impressions of the mind ; but there are the impressions, whether the subject of them is aware of the fact or not ; and wherever you find a human being, you can, by teaching, make those impressions clear to him. You have to make the mind attend to itself, and, so far as these natural beliefs are concerned, your work is done. You find everywhere a ready admission for all ideas of this kind, because in the statement of them you do not so much bring to the mind what is not there, as awaken into consciousness that which is. The statement of our natural impressions is worthy of all acceptation ; is fitted for the assent and persuasion of all, because the counterpart of the statement belongs to human nature.

There are certain propositions which, although accurate in themselves, are not worthy, are not fitted for general

assent. They are proved by local and not universal facts. You may carry them abroad and preach them ; but your exposition will be in vain, because your facts are not intelligible. There are doctrines which, although strictly true, and might be made apparent everywhere, are not needed everywhere, and are not worthy a general propagation. And, lastly, there are advanced positions and results in science, which, in a world like ours, so unequally cultured, can only have a limited appreciation. But the saying of the text carries the self-evidence of a natural belief, carries the supply for a natural want. It is a river rolling through districts divided from each other, some of them cultivated, some of them savage : here are cities built upon its banks ; there are the simpler structures and manners of village life ; farther on, by its remoter courses, are the scattered encampments of the barbarian : but the river through all its mighty travels quenches one thirst ; all drink of it, for all demand it. It is like food and water and air and light, a provision for universal life. Do you ask for a proof of this common necessity of the gospel, and this equal supply ? If any of you need a proof outside the experiment of your own hearts, you have that proof in the history of the gospel progress. It has been preached in all countries, it has been embraced in all countries, it has blessed all countries. At this season of the year you invite missionary intelligence ; this present service is not the opportunity to furnish it, but you may command it at the various meetings<sup>1</sup> about to be held in this metropolis ; it will be sufficient for me to recall to your imagination the heralds of the cross as they stand this day in all latitudes of the earth and under all skies, crying out in all languages, “Christ Jesus came into the world to

<sup>1</sup> Missionary and similar anniversaries held in May.

save sinners." And a great multitude which no man can number make up the host of their disciples. The classes they address represent the foremost minds of the world : leaders of the world's thought ; legislators for the world's peace ; the most eminent masters of knowledge, and the sagest counsellors of wisdom : and they represent the simplest, the most ignorant, the most wild of the earth's tribes ; and they kneel upon the dust that unites them all, and will receive them all, and through all the diversity of their languages, culture, and manners they send up to their common Father one confession : " We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep " ; and one message through one faith in Jesus gives pardon to them all, and the same fruits of heavenly peace and purity distinguish the personal and social results that follow.

I am obliged to confess that, however clearly I have demonstrated the truth of this saying, its fitness for universal reception, and the urgent necessity there exists for every human being to know it, there are many here whom Christ has not saved. Why are you not saved? Not because you have any distinct misgiving as to the truth of the saying. At least, this reason will not apply to most of you, probably to none. On the contrary, if you have thought upon Christ at all, your impressions have been in favour of His position and His claims. Neither have you missed salvation because you considered that this saying did not concern you ; for there have been moments when you were clearly and solemnly convinced that your life is bound up in Christ's life, and that you cannot shake Him off. You have felt the helplessness of a lost condition, and the responsibility of a clearly presented hope of deliverance. But you are not saved. We preach

a message worthy of all acceptance, and you have not accepted it. There are some who sincerely attempt to refute it. You are more blamable than they, because you know it cannot be refuted. They have not had the preliminary convictions that visited you. They have not been instructed and impressed and allured to the truth as you have been.

But to say you have not accepted our message is an inadequate statement of your position. It is not merely that you have not received the truth which communicates God's method of saving sinners, and His offer to save you,—a truth whose expression He has fashioned to suit your mind, whatever be its peculiarities, temperament, and education; but you are chargeable with a personal resistance of the Spirit of Christ. God does not send His truth into the world to take its chance with other truths. Our description of the manner in which the faithful saying is received, its sudden and unreasoning apprehension by the mind, resembling our perception of primary truths, will have prepared you for the fact that the gospel is committed to the supernatural ministry of the Holy Ghost. It is He that makes the truth flash upon the mind. And when you are indifferent to it, you are indifferent to Him; and to be indifferent to offered love is to insult it. The saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," is entrusted to the Spirit of Christ.

He is the preacher of it, not to public assemblies like subordinate expounders and pastors; but in every man's conscience. He has followed you, rising up early that He might begin to impress when your mind begins to think, attending you in every walk of duty, in every path of sin, penetrating with you the shadows of sorrow and pain, and

pressing upon you the saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save thee," varying the manner and emphasis of His address: now a pleader, now a witness, now a judge, now a friend; exhausting all methods of persuasion. He has followed you to this service; for here He has the ready command of other and more powerful instruments than those that ordinarily direct His operations. Here He is in the midst of heaven and earth; and He clothes His word with the powers of both. He gives you the intercession of Christ, the prayers and faith of His people, the argument and sympathy of a united confession. He has collected and condensed for you all the wealth of His grace; and with these wonderful helps He proclaims to your conscience and understanding, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save thee." In the face of arguments like these, not to listen is to reject; and to reject now is not to involve postponement, but possibly intellectual disability, and the danger of judicial abandonment. The terrific words which are put into the mouth of Wisdom, and which describe the earthly experience of those who despise her lessons, have a similar meaning, and describe a more terrific fate when applied to those who "do always resist the Holy Ghost." "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh" (Prov. i. 24-26).



XVI

The Foolishness of the Cross



## THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE CROSS

Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?—1 COR. i. 20.

WE have here placed before us in *juxtaposition* the wisdom of the world and the foolishness of the cross. They are represented as contending forces, not primarily and by formal designation, in conflict with each other, but rivals in the achievement of the moral renovation of the race. By the wisdom of the world is meant all speculations begotten of antipathy to the conception of God and intended to supersede the moral authority of that conception, comprising the intellectual labours and the spirit of those men who *refused to have God in their knowledge* (Rom. i. 28). In this account of the wisdom of the world we must not include the discoveries of science or the beautiful thoughts and graces of literature. The most exalted work of God of which we have any personal knowledge is the mind of man. It has lost its “original brightness,” yet even in partial eclipse it is by far the brightest of known creations. The Scriptures speak of the human understanding in respectful and almost reverent language. Man is described by St. Paul as “*the image and glory of God*” (1 Cor. xi. 7). And in a testimony even more remarkable than this the human spirit is raised into kindred with the Supreme. In the eighth chapter of Proverbs, the Son of God, in the personification

of Wisdom, after describing Himself as the Lord's fellow in planning and furnishing the universe, confesses that He rejoiced in the habitable part of the earth, and that His delight was with the sons of men. The meaning is that Wisdom sported and played with them ; put aside and hid away the majesty of His own intelligence and became a child with the children, that He might watch in their own nature and on their own level, the growth, the unfolding, of those responsible and immortal faculties that distinguished the being whom He had created in His own image. We cannot imagine that the human mind, contending against its limitations, striving to widen its sphere of vision and to wrest from their obscurity the hidden things of darkness, can awaken any other feeling in the Deity than paternal sympathy and felicity. It is not intellectual labour honestly pursued, nor the discoveries and conduct which are the prize of its success, that provoke the denunciations of prophets, the animadversions of apostles, and the ever recurring displeasure of Jesus Himself : it is the mind that makes a boast of its knowledge, that plumes itself upon attainments which its own vanity exaggerates, that insists upon teaching and disdains to be taught, that pursues as its end the distinctions of applause and the worship of inferior minds, that spurns the modesty of the learner and the student, and allows itself to be flattered into delusions of greatness and authority, until it acknowledges no other God, and will have no other God, than its own conceit.

The Bible has no mercy on men of this class, and for a plain reason ; they are in every age the standing opponents of faith, and, whether they intend it or not, of morals also. They are exposed in every book of the sacred Scriptures. They figure in its narratives, in its predictions, in its

parables, and in its meditations. They are made the subject of every species of reproach : invective, satire, irony ; and condemned with judicial precision and solemnity. It is not necessary to sustain this statement by many quotations : but one, a very significant passage, I cannot withhold : “ At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight ” (Matt. xi. 25, 26). Observe the ascription of the invocation : “ *Lord of heaven and earth,* ” of matter and intelligence, of chaos and construction, of concealment and disclosure : “ *Thou* hast hid these things from the wise and prudent,” from mere thinkers and clever men. What things ? The things spoken of in the preceding verses : the judgments of God upon cities and peoples that know not the day of their visitation. The historian describes the doom of a nation, marks the connexion of the events that led to it, and adds the lesson to the common stock of human experience. But there is a divine order in the catastrophe which has overtaken the city, in the plague which has decimated the people, invisible and unknown to the annalist. The eye of faith pierces the fate of a battle, or the birth of a revolution ; and discerns the finger of God in the issue of the first and in the conception of the second. But not only is the governing spirit of history hidden from the historian, the crowning display of the divine wisdom is concealed from the wise : for with the passage that precedes the verse we must include the words that follow : “ *All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.* ” He hideth Himself and He

hideth His ways from the proud, whom “He knoweth afar off” (Ps. cxxxviii. 6). There is a striking meditation in the book of Job which anticipates the explicit statement of the great Teacher: “He shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. . . . He taketh away the heart of the chiefs of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way” (Job xii. 14, 24).

It is not the learning and science of men that God despises: it is the wisdom of men as distinguished from their mental acquisitions: the motives which frequently inspire those attainments and the use to which they are consecrated. What is the pre-eminent virtue of knowledge and speculation? They are supposed to raise a man out of the den of his miserable self into the light and upon the eminence where he can look round him and above him: it is presumed that studies which demand the strain and discipline of his faculties will necessarily reduce within him the temptations and the sway of the animal nature, and put him upon the path of a pure and intelligent manhood. This is the proud mission of Science, and Literature and Art claim to share the task. The votaries of these powers profess that while they have their lighter accomplishments in purifying taste and in furnishing elegant occupation for holiday hours, their chief mission is to raise the standard of life, to encourage its struggles against vice, indolence, and want, to refine and multiply its higher emotions, to increase personal worth, and fit the collective power of communities for the achievements of progress and the provision of national safety and contentment. These intellectual acquirements in themselves are honourable to humanity; but the wisdom which would make the human mind thus cultivated, the ultimate

authority on all moral questions, the wisdom which would make the training of the faculties and sentiments of human nature the source of moral power, has been stultified by inevitable failure. I say inevitable, because the advocates of this wisdom are ever ready to account on local grounds for a failure which they cannot deny.

The wisdom of the world in attempting to cure the disease of humanity never touched the roots of that disease. If man were a mere animal whose generations have been scattered by geographical and social necessities, presenting those typical varieties which are determined by climate, occupation, and the exigencies of adventure, we might look for a type of the family which has been formed under the most favourable conditions ; and it might be possible to collect the unfortunate races under these conditions, or diffuse and make the conditions follow them, and so reclaim the wild members of the race. But man is not an animal : this word does not designate human nature. I grant that where climate is kind, and Nature bountiful, and territorial selection happy, the tribe becomes a people, and the people a great and prosperous nation ; but I deny that this progress necessarily means the distinctive greatness of man. The exaltation of physical power, and the activity of those higher faculties that multiply themselves by combination, and achieve colossal undertakings, present impressive images of greatness. But greatness itself is the ascendancy of moral intelligence, the intelligence that grows righteousness. The wisdom of the world, in its higher mood, is sufficiently enlightened to discern this ; for the mind, every mind under rational conditions, can decipher the laws of its nature, albeit the characters are faintly traced ; and the world has not wanted expositions of

these laws for the guidance of individual conduct and the government of communities. But where is the people, in the past or in the time current, amongst whom the wisdom of the world has established righteousness? Can anything be more shameful, more sickening, than the moral history of civilisation?

I visited Italy the other day; and I studied in its noble and pathetic remains the wisdom of Rome. In that city the man who wrote our text spent two years, and the indulgence which lightened his imprisonment permitted him to see the renowned capital of the world's empire before the decadence of its supremacy was perceptible. He surveyed its palaces, its exquisite and laboured provision for the artificial solicitudes of luxury, its triumphal arches, its amphitheatres, its statues of superstition and of fame. He had read its literature, and was even better versed in the Greek masters who gave to that literature its inspiration and its form. He beheld its great men: the emperor and the satellites that drew their light and the impression of their motions from the throne. He wrote various letters from Rome to Churches and to private friends. Six of these, including the last he ever wrote, are published in this book. There are passages in these compositions where the writer catches and fixes the fleeting aspects of the occupations, the levities, the immoralities, and the talk of Rome. Peter says of Lot, who had not a very sensitive morality, that in Sodom the patriarch was "*vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.*" Let us hear the testimony from Rome of a far truer and loftier spirit. St. Paul's opinion of its philosophy and his analysis of it may be given in a single sentence: "*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions*

*of men, and not after Christ.*" And the deeds which philosophy hardly dared to rebuke, and was utterly unable to arrest, are darkly shadowed forth in these words : " *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness ; but rather convict them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.*" Paul dwelt in Rome in the midst of the most violent contrasts ; there was the Christ within him, and the Belial without ; there were the speculations of Roman thinkers and the certain revelations of the word ; there were the failures of Roman statesmen and the kingdom which cannot be moved. Paul was not, like some good men, narrowed by a certain class of ideas : he did not restrict his admiration and sympathy to the form, the expression, and the situation in which a virtue or a grace may be found, and refuse to acknowledge that it could be found anywhere else ; for when his spirit was stirred within him by what he was forced to witness in Rome, the injustice and cruelty of power, the insolence of wealth, the unspeakable corruptions of literature, the unscrupulous arts of ambition, the sacrilegious pollution of human life, he writes in a large and grateful appreciation of the good and the beautiful wherever it can be discovered : " *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue (any other excellence which I have left out), think on these things.*"

Reflect on the moral condition of Rome as witnessed by St. Paul, where goodness and equity, purity and peace, were fallen in the streets and " trodden under foot of men." Even in the worst times these virtues have found shelter in the tribunals of justice and in the sanctuaries of home ;

but here, where the intellect of man and the accomplishments of intellect were shining in the zenith of refinement, where the wisdom of the world, in every department in which it is concerned, had exhausted its resources, morality, which is supposed to be the heritage of culture, was unknown ; there was not a rudiment of it left. Paul's testimony is profoundly suggestive, and his description of the characteristics of this infamy bears the minute and vivid realism of an eye-witness. The words I am about to quote were written to his Roman friends from Corinth before he himself had seen Rome, but they represent with equal exactness the philosophy and the society of both cities : "*As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful*" (Rom. i. 28-31).

So God stultifies the wisdom of the world, exposing the atheism of its spirit, the folly of its methods, and its pathetic helplessness.

But the foolishness of the Cross was in Rome. The followers of the crucified Jesus represented this designation of their faith with curious and enforced fidelity. There were not at that time many disciples in Rome. But the new faith was known ; and the singular ways of the believers brought them into conspicuous and hostile notice. The estimation in which they were held finds expression in the correspondence of proconsuls and philo-

sophers, in the songs of the day, and in the bloody pastimes of the theatre. They lived under a heavy and menacing pressure of rebuke. They stole their opportunities of fellowship from the night; they hid themselves where the living are not found, among the tombs; and their songs to the Master broke the silence and startled the shadows of death. These precautions of their prudence or their fear exposed them to suspicion. Some condemned them as secret conspirators, others accused them of unnatural offences; but the general sentiment regarding them was the contemptuous resentment mingled with pity with which we think of the mischief which an idiot might do. In the expressive phrase of their illustrious prisoner, they were "the offscouring of all things" (1 Cor. iv. 13).

The followers of the Cross were fools: the doctrines of the Cross foolishness. This was God's plan. At all costs the wickedness and folly of the atheistic spirit must be made flagrant; and they were made flagrant. The atheistic spirit in the interests of humanity has been, from the beginning, a universal and unqualified failure. It has done nothing for humanity. Whether pervading savage life in the elementary forms of idol-worship, or penetrating the speculations of philosophy, or attempting to guide the ethical instincts of the mind into a basis of moral law, it has left behind nothing but disaster; it has befooled the worshipper, it has betrayed the legislator, it has ruined the people. And but for the fact that God has left in every mind a witness to controvert and resist it, a witness which even sceptical habits, long continued, cannot silence, and which the most tyrannical lusts cannot intimidate, the human race would have perished outright. It is to this inner consciousness of God, supported by the manifold testimonies of

creation and providence, that we owe whatever is worth preserving in law, in literature, in politics, and in the social administrations of life.

Whatever this atheistic wisdom has undertaken to perform on behalf of the human world, to purify the sources of pleasure, to diminish the miseries of life, and to strengthen the defences of society, it has not only never achieved, but it has aggravated the very evils it was commissioned to destroy. God has stultified it because it went forth to do its work in independence of Him. The atheistic spirit to-day stands convicted as a fool! I am not speaking rant, but the words of truth and soberness; and the man who impugns this verdict is bound to point out, if he can, an example in the vast wilderness of ignorance, animalism, and inhumanity upon which it has been at work during the ages that are past, where even an acre of that desert has been rescued from the wild, and converted into a fruitful field.

But the foolishness of the Cross stands vindicated to-day as the divinest wisdom. Let me insist here in passing that the “Cross” gives its specific designation to the entire gospel. Christianity is an exposition of the Cross: if it were not, the stigma of folly would never have rested upon it. The Cross is not an historic feature of the faith. The crucifixion of Jesus is the central fact of the system. The edifice of doctrine is built into it and rises from it. It is this and this only that explains the ridicule and the shame with which the wisdom of the world has attempted to cover it. If Christ had been crucified as a martyr for the truth, the wisdom of the world would have extolled Him, and given Him a foremost place in the ranks of honourable fame. But because His death was a preordained atonement for the world, and the divine forgiveness and regeneration of men

the prescribed result of faith in His blood and in His resurrection, the wisdom of the world cried out, Nonsense ! The foolishness of the Christian's God, to suppose that the intelligence of men would assent to a Cross and a resurrection ! The intelligence of men might not assent to the testimony of a resurrection ; the pride of men might scorn the sacrifice of an atonement : but this rejection of the foundation truths and methods of the gospel was in the counsel of God ; it lay in the process of taking the wise in their own craftiness : the hiding of God's prudence and omnipotence behind the forms of weakness and reproach was the trap into which they fell : "God *chose* the foolish things of the world, that He might put to shame them that are wise" (1 Cor. i. 27). The apostle cries out in the midst of his argument, and with pardonable triumph, "Where is the wise?" We might take up the parable with even greater exultation : Where indeed is the wise TO-DAY ? Where are they in the presence of the great problems which they are supposed to have made their own,—the problem of the degeneracy of races and how to arrest it ; of bringing back the departing manhood of savage tribes ; of invigorating and cleansing the stagnant and decaying mind of the older nations of the earth ; of meeting with adequate measures of conciliation and provision the cravings of the humanity of to-day ? Where are the wise ? Not in the field, leading despairing peoples to the vantage-ground of hope and resolution. They are at home, studying, writing, disputing, criticising. They were doing it in the days of St. Paul ; they are doing it now ! It is their vocation ! What is the foolishness of the cross doing ? Changing the world. Its disciples are abroad : I mean they are everywhere among the people ; the people are the volumes they read ; the cries of the people are the speech to which they

give articulate form, and reduce to language, and condense into eloquent appeal ; the ignorance, the darkness, the destitution, and the strifes of the nations are the sciences which these true philosophers are seeking to master.

With respect to the beneficent forces now in operation on the continents and islands of the world, is there one of them which did not spring from the foolishness of the Cross ? Who discovered the interior world of Africa, and set in motion the energies which are making a people of them who were no people ? A missionary. Who first solved the problem of educating the women of India, and are now proclaiming liberty to the captives of the zenana ? Missionaries. Who first brought into modern geography the hidden lands and rivers of China, and unsealed for the inspection of scholarship, and opened for the enrichment of commerce, the language, the philosophy, and the marts of the great empire of the East ? Missionaries. Who first dared the cannibal shores of New Zealand, Tonga, and Fiji, and made intelligent and independent peoples of inhuman wretches whose trade was war, whose appetite flesh and blood ? Missionaries. And, to come nearer home, who are those in Europe who are now lifting up their voice and devoting their means and influence to expose and condemn vice in high places and in low places ? who are the persistent enemies of war, of the accursed ambition and trade of war ? who were the first to maintain that when childhood is stranded upon the desolate coast of orphanage, the country should take up the little ones ? who are those whose righteousness, purity, and gentleness humanise the legislation of governments, and exalt the sentiments of society ? The followers of the Nazarene. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ” (Gal. vi. 14).

XVII

*Keeping the Faith*



## KEEPING THE FAITH

I have kept the faith.—2 TIM. iv. 7.

THESE are among the last words of one of the most thoroughly honest men that God ever made. He wrote them from a prison, from the condemned cell of a prison ; his execution was at hand. The cause of his imprisonment, and of the dreadful end to which he was sentenced, was his obstinate adherence to the faith. He had received it many years before, for he was now an old man ; he had had no rest from the time he had taken charge of the deposit ; reputation, ease, wealth, station, and something more cherished than all, the opinions and aims of his youth, had gone for the sake of the faith.

What did St. Paul mean by “the faith”? We may, I think, learn this distinctly by examining the expression as it occurs in other passages of the New Testament. St. Jude informs his readers that he was moved to exhort them to contend “for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints” (ver. 3), because certain men had crept into the Church who denied the Lord that bought them. The expression here means the sum of what Christians believe. St. Paul uses it in the same sense in several instances in his epistles to Timothy. In one place he says : “But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some

shall fall away from the faith"; and again, "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. iv. 1; v. 8). From these examples we conclude that "the faith" comprehends the religious doctrines which Christians believed. These doctrines have been once for all delivered to us, and we are pledged to keep them. The apostle employs another expression for a compendious description of these doctrines: he calls them "the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which," says he, "was committed to my trust"; and unquestionably he means the gospel in the words, "I have kept the faith." I have kept the gospel. As little may we doubt the reference in the following passage: "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith" (1 Tim. vi. 20).

The faith—that is, the gospel; in using these terms the apostle meant the same thing. But the word gospel comprehends a broad circumference of truth; and lest we should allow the expression "the faith" to widen into the indefinite, and miss the sharply lined idea of the words, *I have kept*, let us select that particular revelation which the term gospel strictly defines: the good news that a Saviour has come, who is Christ the Lord; expanded by the apostle after this manner: "Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by Him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts xiii. 38, 39). This is the announcement concerning which that declaration was made, so noble in its courage and transparency: "I am

not ashamed of the gospel" (Rom. i. 16). The apostle says he kept this faith. From which I gather that the gospel is in itself a complete declaration, a complement of unchangeable truths. It revolutionises the mind that receives it, while itself remains untouched. No mind, however powerful, can leave any impress upon it; no conjunction of minds can modify it: it is not like the earth, the surface of which reflects the labours and fancies of the last generation; it is like the heavens, which, so far as man is concerned, remain the same as before man was created. The heavens have had a wonderful influence upon the education of our race: we are indebted to them for many of our sciences; they awaken the inspiration of much of our poetry; they invite and stimulate our contemplation, and necessarily expand our capacity for sublime thoughts, problems, and aspirations. And yet they are as if we were not: there is no trace of man upon them. As the heavens now manifest the praises of God with the same stars that awoke the wonder and reverence of the earliest families of the earth, so it is with the faith. It declares the glory of God with the same truths, the same in number and the same in significance, as were delivered to the first saints.

St. Paul did not understand the modern doctrine of development as applied to the truths of the gospel; he did not believe that they were susceptible of any extension to meet the advancing wants of an advancing civilisation, that they must present another aspect, or a series of accommodating aspects, to succeeding times. His view was that they were delivered once for all, and were to be kept; that in their provisions they anticipated all changes that could possibly result from an indefinite progress; that they surround the entire circle of human advancement as the

atmosphere surrounds the globe ; that they change all things, and are not to be changed themselves ; that while the beauty and fashions of man fade and reappear, and the thoughts of men perish, to be reproduced in cycles of change with their origin without date, and their first forms lost in the additions of development, the word of our God shall stand for ever : not the thoughts of God as a purpose ever present with the Eternal and unknown to us, but the word of God, a particular declaration of God to us, a declaration complete in announcement, in form and in provision : never left for man to finish : "and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Again, St. Paul never understood that the gospel was an instrument of elevation required for a certain age ; to do a service for the education of the race at a particular time of depression, and then, as having nothing more to do, to fall back and become a memory or a history. He associates this particular word of God with the whole career of the human family : for Christ is the subject of that word ; that word is the revelation of Christ ; and St. Paul regarded Christ as the central person and the central power of the race : "for as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. xv. 22) ; and Christ Himself affirms, "I am the last" (Rev. i. 17).

But, on the other hand, the apostle did not consider the gospel as one of several revelations of Christ. As he believed in one universal Christ identified with all ages, so he maintained that He could only be known through one gospel ; as he never separated the word from Christ, so he never divided Christ from the word. He saw no Christ in the idolatries of the heathen, no gospel in the inner light of the pagan moralist ; he acknowledged a law written in the heart

of the Gentile; he confessed a witness in nature to the power and godhead of the Creator. He produced this law and this witness, not as a substitute for the gospel, but to stop the mouth of those who might affirm that they could do without it. He held up Christ and the word of the gospel as inseparable to the end of the world.

As an illustration of these views of St. Paul, recall such passages as these: "Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me" (2 Tim. i. 13). "God be thanked, that ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered" (Rom. vi. 17). "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. i. 15). "If any man consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is puffed up, knowing nothing" (1 Tim. vi. 3, 4).

Observe also in his epistles to young ministers, how frequently he cautions them not to countenance a disputatious spirit; to discourage debates upon doctrines most assuredly believed by Christ's disciples: not that the apostle wished to fetter discussion; he was too old and too triumphant a logician to disparage a weapon he had handled so well, or to decline the field of fair argument: but he despised an affectation of scepticism, when conceit and not sincere doubting puts the question, and suggests the difficulty, and hesitates to accept the solution; and he knew too well what injury is done to the conscience when the convictions of the judgment are played with as immaterial speculations. They were to resist this hurtful tendency by preaching sound doctrine.

The ministers of the present day have unhappily to resist

a temper similar to the flippant unbelief that grieved and provoked the rebukes of the aged apostle. I am afraid that ministers have themselves to thank for it. This sceptical disposition would not be so popular as it is if we preached in the form of sound words. If the pulpit is made the vehicle of speculation, we shall have speculation in the pew, in the family ; your very children will catch the trick of it. If the sound is uncertain here, ought we to complain if it be uncertain elsewhere ? The doctrines of salvation are few, they are certainly defined, their formulas have been either dictated or approved by the Holy Ghost. God's ministers are called to keep them, to preach them as they find them, *i.e.* in words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, and to preach those things only which appertain to them. If the professed ambassador delivers but seldom his message of reconciliation, and when he does announce it, obscures it by subtleties and refining, and weakens it by indifference, his hearers cannot regard as of much importance the alleged quarrel between them and God. We are not so much teachers as the medium of Christ's teaching. You see that teaching through our presentation as you see light through the atmosphere ; if we darken Christ's counsel by words without knowledge, Christ's light in us becomes darkness to you. We stand in Christ's stead : not to put words in His mouth which He never uttered, or to ascribe to Him purposes which He never conceived, but to repeat His invitations, to bear our witness to His sincerity, and to testify the fact of our own salvation : or, to sum up all in the beautiful imagery of the apostle, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6, 7).

As a further illustration of the fixedness of gospel doctrines, is it not true that in those periods of the history of the Church when Christianity flourished most conspicuously, the doctrines of the cross were preached most nearly to the simple forms in which they were delivered? Times of theological controversy were always followed by seasons of spiritual dearth, by heresies, divisions, and apostasies. The farther the Church receded from the New Testament, the nearer she approached the world; escaping the presence of the truth as it is in Jesus, she taught for doctrines the commandments of men; and the human and the sinful became part of her creed. Her clergy were an easy prey to ambition; they called each other master and lord: covetousness, strife, and war plainly declared a kingdom which was of this world. The simple fold of our great Shepherd devastated by these wolves in the clothing of the flock, the sheep were either destroyed or scattered to mountains and dens and caves of seclusion; and the Roman and Greek Churches are the waste places where once bloomed the tree of life and smiled the Paradise of God!

And what awakened the movement of the Reformation? Was it not that men felt their way back to the New Testament, and discovered in its literal simplicity the faith, and preached it again as St. Paul preached it? When they brought out the cross from the place where polluted and designing hands had concealed it, then the original pentecostal power returned; and the word of God grew and multiplied, and the lovely fruits of Christianity in personal experience and in social life again resumed their heavenly beauty upon the field of the world.

We believe in the laws of moral development; but history proves that these laws are under the supreme

control and direction of the immutable doctrines of the gospel, and that when these doctrines are not kept, are not preached and carried out according to New Testament models, there is retrogression in our race instead of advancement. The facts of Christ's manifestation in the flesh, Christ's death for sinners, Christ's resurrection, and the agency of the Holy Ghost, are like the laws of nature: we can study them and apply them, and in a reverent spirit appropriate them, but we cannot change them, we dare not tamper with them: they contain elements of destruction as well as elements of blessing; they will bring down judgment upon the trifler, and lay their infinite stores of good at the feet of the devout student.

But Paul kept the faith not only as a deposit of doctrine which he could transmit to successors, but as the ground of his personal salvation. It was committed to his trust as a preacher to proclaim it, to defend it, to provide for its safe keeping ere he should depart, and, if necessary, to die for it; but this was only part of his trust, and he might have done all this, and still have been an unfaithful custodian. He did more than lodge it in documents, expound it in sermons, and impart it to disciples: he kept the power of it in his heart; he maintained a living example of its efficacy. His own life was to be a part of his argument. The faith which he defined was not kept unless it was supported by his own pattern of its power; the other parts of the Christian scheme, its verities, its graces, and its duties, required also the corroboration of his experience; he kept the faith in his life.

No Christian advocate ever so thoroughly joined himself to his cause as did St. Paul. He cheered the despairing by pointing out that he himself, the chief of sinners, had

obtained mercy ; he urged an absolute surrender to Christ, and proved that the loss of all things for Him was gain to the loser, by describing what grace had enabled him to give up, and how largely grace had recompensed him for the sacrifice. He dealt with every case from the analogies of his own position ; not by a rhetorical fiction, throwing himself by the force of genius into imaginary or sympathetic resemblances to the condition of his hearers ; he was one with them, and his various experience furnished him with the counterpart of their sufferings, with encouragement for their hopes, with reasons for their caution, with motives for their perseverance, and with an example for their imitation.

He kept the faith by proving what it could do for a man, what it could do for *him*. It had raised him to visions and revelations ; it had given him a superhuman contentment in unexampled sufferings ; it had translated him from the hardest and narrowest Pharisaism into an unrestricted philanthropy and a charity burning to save the world. Above all, it had revealed Christ to him as another self, Christ as his personal God ; whom he now preached, not as a name, not as an abstraction, not as the conclusion of an argument, but as a living spirit ; not as the pledge of an immortality to come, but as the companion of an immortality begun. “I live ; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. ii. 20). “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. i. 21). He guided the experience of his Churches through the vicissitudes of the Christian life with the firm hand of a skilful pilot who knows his ground ; who is acquainted with the tides, the shallows, the deeps, the sunken rocks, and the headlands, from a long and careful familiarity with the whole of the ship’s course.

It was the experience of the power of the gospel that endeared to St. Paul the fixed doctrines of the truth, and enabled him to keep them so well. His spiritual elevation was the fruit of those doctrines. He loved them for the sake of that fruit ; he knew that to tamper with them was to impair their productive energies ; he kept them for his own sake, and for the sake of the world ; he kept them for his Master's sake, whose mind was embodied in them. He had seen Churches flourish by adhering to them ; he had seen Churches fade by letting them go : he guarded them with a sentinel's vigilance, he had fought for them with a hero's daring. Had he been indifferent to their forms, had he attempted to hold their benefits subjectively, had he smoothed down their peculiarities to disarm the Jew and conciliate the Greek, St. Paul might have had an easy life, an honourable reputation, and a brilliant external success. But his Lord had said, "Keep that which I have committed unto thee until that day." Many an enemy had attempted to snatch this glorious standard from him, many a false brother had striven to surprise his resolution by treachery ; but the assaults of violence and the sorceries of seduction alike failed to win it from him. He kept the faith, and the faith kept him ; its springs of consolation plentifully recompensed him for his fortitude. The smile of approval from his Captain illumined the darkness of the soldier's watch, and was the inspiration of the struggle by which he overcame. He was often weak, often dispirited, often perplexed ; but the faith was always in his grasp and in his heart.

And now it had come to this : he was thrown into the horrible solitude of a Roman dungeon. His friends for the most part shrank from him ; like his Master, he was left

alone. He was no longer young, and equal, as in former days, to the endurance of physical privation. He was no longer visited by those beckoning and alluring dreams of romance which always lighten up the most desperate sufferings of youthful life. He was an old man, when nature requires to be nursed the second time, nervously sensitive to pain and outward disturbances ; and as he lay in his cell through the long hours that brought no alternations of sunshine, he had leisure to review his life. That life had been a long life ; for what ? He loved learning in his very soul ; but he had been esteemed a fool by learned men. He had travelled with classic tastes ; but wherever he had gone he had been a butt for ridicule, a victim for malice, a prisoner for law. Upon his back were the scars of two public whippings, and his feet were so familiar with bonds that they seemed naturally to belong to him : and now the axe was sharpening for him, and all the preliminaries of the execution, and the stroke that would sever his head, and the horrible sequel, were in his imagination. Every power that he was taught to respect on earth was against him ; learning, public opinion, the government, the masses ; they were going to put him to death as a rebel. If they would let his white hairs alone, he would in a very short space die naturally ; but even the last few drops of the oil of life were not allowed to burn out, they must quench the lamp in blood. Had his life been a mistake ? Had he been a deluded enthusiast ? Was he really the madman Festus considered him to be ? Even the Churches that had been his glory and his joy had disappointed him : there had been frightful licentiousness in the Corinthian society ; most disastrous heresies in the Galatian Church ; and the Romans, whose faith had been spoken of throughout the world,

and from whom he had expected such a cordial reception and such a strong support, had made no preparation to welcome him when he arrived. Some of them were ashamed of his chain, and those who did visit him had to be sent for. They fell to disputing with him instead of comforting him ; and when brought before the tribunal, not one of them stood with him : "all forsook me," said the venerable saint and martyr ; "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." These overwhelming recollections rushed upon his mind as he lay musing, awaiting his fate. "Tis impossible to say he did not feel them ; but I think I hear him whisper to himself : "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy" (Acts xx. 24).

XVIII

Jesus Christ not Yea and Nay



## JESUS CHRIST NOT YEA AND NAY

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you . . .  
was not yea and nay, but in Him was yea.—2 COR. i. 19.

YEA and nay are expressions that mingle together in our search for truth. When they follow each other, they indicate the conjectural temper of examination, and the revision of a former judgment. I have found it! cries the delighted explorer; but, perceiving that what he had hastily considered the sign of its presence was an illusion, his yea is followed by the melancholy nay. If the truth he is seeking is to be found, if it be anywhere within the limits of knowledge, and the discovery be merely a question of careful and patient experiment, he may find it, and a permanent *yea* may place it among the gains of the mind. If it cannot be known clearly and exactly, it is among the yea and nay problems of human science, of which there are many in nearly every province of enquiry. These problems are secrets: some of them lie in the region of matter; others belong to the kingdom of the mind; others are midway between these two worlds. Light, electricity, heat, sensation, the human will in relation to the doctrine of necessity, and similar questions, are examples of subjects that have not yet admitted their students to an exact knowledge of them. They are yea and nay according to the verdicts of speculation. Men adopt theories concerning them, which

after a longer or briefer reign are displaced by other views ; and the yea of the present time may become the nay of the next generation. This pursuit of what in some instances may be unknowable, so far from being a vain or unworthy labour, is equally noble and profitable. There is secured, in the first place, the health and education of the faculties which the search calls into operation, whether we miss our prize or win it ; the student who competes for an academic distinction and loses it, secures a gain of no mean value in the culture involved and advanced in his competition. And, in the second place, we gather up truth on the way, discovering what we never sought, and something far more precious, it may be, than the shadowy good that first engaged our search.

But is Jesus Christ a yea and nay problem ? Were the apostles seeking something respecting Him which no enquirer had found ? did their sermons and general teaching consist of speculations upon the nature and work of their Lord in which there was a permitted disagreement among themselves ? did they tolerate each other's views because no one of them was certain respecting his own view ? There were unsettled questions among them affecting the administration of their Churches, and these questions were for a time a disturbing element even in the personal intercourse of the apostles themselves. Their great Teacher did not teach them everything ; they had good sense, fervent piety, and the abiding presence of the Spirit ; and with these helps they were sufficiently equipped for the duties of governing their societies. They laid down no rules that should be equally binding upon all. St. James followed one method in Jerusalem ; St. Paul another in Antioch : that which was yea in one Church was nay in another Church.

But was there in these first Churches a *doctrinal* divergence? Did the leaders of early Christian thought carry their disputes into the message for the proclamation of which they were made apostles? This question is answered in the text by St. Paul on behalf of himself and his brethren: "The Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay." The apostle means that what they preached concerning Him did not belong to the indefinite region of yea and nay; it was explicit, intelligible, and ultimate. St. Paul does not convey the impression that they comprehended Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in Himself. Of the extent of His attributes they could neither say yea nor nay. There was a line that marked off the possibilities of their knowledge: they could look out on the far ocean of God's being, in which there are no soundings, of which there is no chart; but they could only look and muse with baffled gaze, like St. Paul, who exclaimed: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

But what the apostles taught concerning Christ was explicit and intelligible doctrine. This will be apparent at once if we consider the manner in which they acquired it. It was not discovered by them, but revealed to them. They did not receive hints, suggestions, ideas, to follow out and work into results. From the first they were completely informed; they discovered nothing, they concluded nothing. They knew Christ after the flesh; they had the opportunity of studying Him during three years of personal intercourse, and they did study Him: to say nothing of their position and duty as scholars of Christ, there was everything about Him to invite, to fascinate, and to hold attention; and the

men being always together, and in more than sufficient numbers to represent every needful variety of observation, they were able, from time to time, to compare notes; and there was the gracious permission to ask questions of the great Rabbi, when a hard saying or an unusual behaviour puzzled them: yet, with these advantages of close and prolonged fellowship, they could make no use of their notes and their facts when He put this plain question to them: “Who say ye that I am?” (Matt. xvi. 15.) That question was addressed to them in the third year of His ministry, and supposing Christ to have been accessible to the ordinary means of knowledge, they ought, by that time, between them, to have been able to give a direct reply. It is true that the answer of St. Peter was complete; but the Lord affirmed that the answer was given to Peter by the Father, and if you look at the words, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and study them in connexion with Peter’s conduct subsequent to the confession, you will perceive that the grand truth expressed was neither the discovery nor the attainment of this apostle’s mind. It was a flash from the Father’s own light, but could not be retained by Peter except through humility and watchfulness. It was even dimmed a few minutes after he uttered it, when his own narrowness and selfishness endeavoured to dissuade Christ from the approaching baptism of His suffering: “Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee”; and he who under the Father’s light represented the foundation of the Church became the type of its stumbling stone and rock of offence. “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumblingblock unto Me” (Matt. xvi. 23).

It follows that in regard to the nature and claims of Christ the apostles were supernaturally taught. They were

so instructed and educated as to make it impossible that there should ever be any doubt in their minds on these three subjects—

1. As to who Christ was with respect to the gospel which they were called to proclaim to the world.
2. As to the precise relation in which He stood to men.
3. As to the conditions under which the blessings of the gospel are made accessible to men.

If their minds had not been made up on these three subjects, how could they have excluded hesitation, misgiving, and speculation from so unearthly a message as this : “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life”? (John iii. 16.) They were called to proclaim this to the world, in all languages and to all nations ; and no man was allowed to begin his work until the last obstinately lingering trace of doubt had disappeared from his mind. If you study Christ’s education of the apostles, and the provision He made for their perfect intellectual and spiritual equipment, you will perceive that the result He contemplated and accomplished was the unquestioning assurance of His men, never afterwards to be disturbed, as to the character of His person and the fact of His resurrection. Christ was the central subject of their message, and the clearest knowledge of Him was the essential qualification of the apostolic preacher. A single incident will illustrate the Saviour’s purpose to make every man a believer before He made him a preacher. Thomas was the sceptic of the apostles. He was attached to the person of our Lord perhaps as ardently as the most credulous follower ; he was equally honest and consistent. But he doubted the fact of the Lord’s resurrection ; he held out against evidences that

had convinced his brethren. But this state of mind disqualified Thomas for the ministry ; and the Lord went out of His way to meet the mental peculiarity of the doubter, that He might not be to one of His own preachers yea and nay, but an everlasting yea.

But when all was done by the Lord Himself during His resurrection interviews to advance the apostles to the full assurance of the understanding, when every man was so fully persuaded in his own mind that he was ready to go forth to the world and die for his convictions, they were commanded yet to tarry. To themselves there seemed to be nothing wanting. They had heard the Word of life declare who He was, they had seen Him with their eyes, had looked upon Him with the closest observation, and their hands had handled Him ; and with these infallible proofs they were impatient to bear their witness and show unto the world that eternal Life which was with the Father and had been so gloriously manifested unto them. But they were not yet ready for their work ; they had been made believers, they had not been made preachers. They had received faith, they must now be endued with power from on high (Luke xxiv. 49). As they themselves had been convinced through the omnipotent energy of Christ, acting upon their own mental difficulties with immediate triumph, they must convince the world through the same energy. They were called to stand in the place of Christ, and they must speak with the power of Christ. It was not enough that their hearts were on fire with the love of Christ : they had to preach, to declare, to write ; in one word, their grand calling was expression, and they must have tongues of fire !

But why this supernatural preparation ? Because they could never reach the world by the common methods of

statement and persuasion. The truths they were charged to deliver were so new and apparently so contrary to the facts of nature and of life, and, moreover, they proposed such radical alterations in individual conduct and society, that they would never be believed, they would never even get a hearing, unless their words were attended by the demonstration of the Holy Ghost. The state of the world which they were commanded to Christianize is exactly described by St. Paul, applying a passage of Isaiah to the condition of the natural mind: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. ii. 9). This Scripture does not refer to the glories of heaven, but to gospel mysteries; it affirms that there is no capacity in the human mind, as it is, for the admission of Christ, and the heavenly truths that are manifested with Him. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. ii. 14): not because he has a distaste for them, not because he wants will or culture: he simply wants discernment: "he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged."

The ability to receive knowledge supposes in the mind that receives it the elements of knowledge. How can any description of nature be intelligible to us without the preliminary ideas of space, duration, and resistance? Now an unregenerate man in regard to spiritual things, however well educated and largely informed, is like a half-witted person, who, wanting the instinctive sense of proportion and distance, laughs when you tell him that the moon is larger than it seems. The deity of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, and any reported event which he cannot account for by ordinary experience, are foolishness unto the natural man, neither can he know them. Such was the condition of the

world when the apostles went forth to turn it from darkness to light and from sin to holiness.

Now what was the subject of the preaching of the apostle and his brethren? Will any one deny that it was *Christ and Him crucified?* Is it too much to affirm that this was their only subject, that all other topics engaging their eloquence and commanding their labours were branches from this stock? “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which was preached by me and Silvanus and Timotheus.” If, then, it be true that they hoped to save the world through the preaching of Christ, and Christ alone; if every part of their message related to Him; if it was their business to make men come to Him, trust in Him, love Him, live like Him, they must have known whether He was the true God, or simply the sent of God. If Peter, Paul, or John had been asked whether the Lord whom they preached were truly God or not, would they have given a yea and nay reply? “Yes, He was, in a certain sense—no, He was not absolutely God.” Would they have hovered about the mystery in this style, afraid to pronounce upon it or to touch it? Assume for a moment that their answer would have been, No, He is not God; assume that they knew there was a being, separate from and higher than the Son of God, whom therefore it would have been idolatry to worship, would they not have guarded their definitions and descriptions from the possibility of misconception? They were laying the foundation of all future teaching, they were fixing the phraseology and formulas of all future Churches: can you conceive it possible that they should speak doubtfully on the subject of Christ’s Godhead? They found the world in a state of idolatry: would they preach down idolatry by setting up a new idol? And yet if Christ be not very God, they did set up a new idol; an idol not the less dangerous to

morality because he was most like God, but more dangerous, since the glory of his mind and character would be more likely to alienate the world from its rightful Creator and Lord.

Brethren, the apostles did know whether Christ was absolute God or not. Their statements concerning Him have the precision and conclusiveness of exact knowledge. When they are far within the depths of metaphysics, in mysteries untrodden by man or angel, where seas of thought cover seas, seas without shore, their step is as firm, their path as defined, as if they followed some public highway of human experience. So walked through these depths St. John : "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John i. 1). So grandly moved the steps of Paul : "Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God" (Phil. ii. 6). In language equally clear and decisive, the writer to the Hebrews affirms the Godhead of Christ : "When He bringeth in the firstborn into the world He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him" (Heb. i. 6).

Could honest men have written such words as these, if they had known that Jesus was not Jehovah ? Are they the utterances of men whose minds were not made up ? Is there here a symptom of speculative uncertainty ? They may leave their readers in doubt as to the meaning of certain expressions ; but the writers themselves have no doubt. And all their teaching, whether on faith or morals, is yea or nay, never yea and nay. On any truth affecting our salvation they never leave the burden of discovery with us ; they leave simply the burden of obedience. They never presume that, beginning with hesitation, we can reason our-

selves into assurance. We hesitate on personal fitness and personal right; our faith may have a frail beginning, because it is the beginning of a germ, and in its struggling growth there may be a perpetual conflict between yea and nay. But personal confidence in our own appreciation of the truth, and personal confidence in the unwavering teaching of Scripture, are as different from each other as the hand of a drowning man who emerges from the water and gets hold of a rock, and the rock to which he clings. The unwavering Scripture educates the wavering faith. If the Scripture and I waver together, it must be all sea, and God help me! But the clear, well-defined, and immutable truth, as truth is in Jesus, always yea in Him and Amen to the glory of God, is the refuge of my poor self-distrusting heart. Where should we be if we had in the first place to arrive at the certainty of a revelation, and in the second place to seek the assurance of our own interest in it? Such a gospel might be a gospel for scholars, but it could never be a gospel for the world. In fact, it would not be a gospel at all! A gospel is glad tidings for a poor sinner, and not a problem for philosophers. How can that be glad tidings to me, if I do not know what the tidings are? Unintelligible news is a contradiction in terms! I am a sinner: no one can reason me out of that. The power of deliverance is not in myself: no one can deceive me on a matter of fact of which a thousand failures have convinced me. I desire to be saved: I sometimes groan for salvation. I want a Deliverer; not the lesson of a Deliverer, not the example of a Deliverer, but the arm of a Deliverer: not one mighty to instruct, but mighty to save. I want a spirit stronger than my own: I want a hope surer than my own resolution. I have no time for study; I have no ability and no reading to enable me

to grapple with theological difficulties. I want a brief answer to the question that torments my life, What must I do to be saved? You reply, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Who is He that I may believe on Him? Is He God, and must I worship? or is He man, and must I simply listen and obey? Is He a sacrifice for sin, and must I believe in an atonement? or is He a teacher of virtue, and must I follow a moralist?

These questions belong not to the mysteries of religion; they contain the essence of the gospel message. If you cannot give me an answer without refining, and explaining, and comparing, and weighing, then your gospel was not intended for plain working men. But is it not the illustrious distinction of the gospel that it addresses itself to the poor (Luke vii. 22); that when the ignorant man hears it, he shall understand it at once; that the simplicity of its arguments, the reasonableness of its appeals, and the tremendous personal significance of its facts, shall leave him without excuse? It is only by driving them upon a dilemma which touches some cherished interest that you can get the masses to move. When you lecture men on emigration, on temperance, on capital and labour, or on politics, you would never get a hearing if you were to trim between yea and nay. If you give them advice, you say at once what you mean, and they listen. And do you think [you can turn men from their sins by a yea and nay Christ? The gospel deals with the most momentous of our concerns; it is a message from Heaven to guilty men; its promises and judgments reach into eternity; it commands all men everywhere to repent: but if its ministers handle these awful verities as if their own minds were not made up respecting them, if they invest

them with a speculative haze, will not men call them a passing cloud ? and will not the degree of importance which such a ministry claims for them be the measure of the ridicule with which men will hear them, or of the indifference with which they will disregard them ? But how stands the case ? I go into a church with my mind in the depths of trouble, thirsting for the assurance of salvation : and yet respecting the nature of Christ, the Saviour, the subject which above all others it behoves me to know, the yea of the preacher is so nicely balanced by the nay, and the nay by the yea, that, what between affirmatives and negatives, I am not only without relief, but the preacher's difficulties are added to my own, and I leave the house of God, which ought to be the house of revelation, more hopelessly embarrassed than before. If one teacher says yea to my enquiries, and another says nay, and a third both yea and nay, how can I decide between the disputes of doctors ? If St. Paul were preaching in yonder church, and reasoning with my conscience on righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come, making every nerve tremble with solicitude and fear, would he attempt to soothe my alarms by a yea and nay reply ? This hesitating, speculative spirit of the modern pulpit, this yea and nay compromise between the supposed requirements of science and the old verities of the gospel, is driving men from the Church, instead of attracting them to it. "Men who are passing their lives in trying to show that it is at the very least reasonably probable that two and two make five, and that this is the true meaning of the assertion that they make four, if those who say so only knew their own minds, . . . have a passion for tying together bits of broken glass, and declaring that the glass is even stronger than it was before it was broken. It is not

an unamiable weakness. It claims a capacity for appreciating the merits and beauties of conflicting systems: but it is a weakness. With their conciliatory systems and their half measures, the go-betweens of reason and faith are beginning to be a nuisance to men."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Saturday Review.*



XIX

A Revelation by the Way



## A REVELATION BY THE WAY

He talked with us by the way.—LUKE xxiv. 32.

THERE is an indescribable charm in the story of the Emmaus journey. We are in ready and close sympathy with the two men who, on the day of our Lord's resurrection, and before that resurrection was known, at least to the travellers, left Jerusalem at midday to walk to a village about eight miles to the north-west of the city. To them it was, perhaps, a journey of three hours: for Eastern people talk a great deal when they travel in company; and in moments when the conversation grows animated and absorbing, the walk frequently slackens into a saunter. We know little of these men, nothing of one of them, and only the name of the other; their very obscurity is a comfort to us. The one who is called Cleopas must not be confounded with Cleophas, or rather Clopas, a brother-in-law of the Virgin, who is mentioned by St. John in his crucifixion chapter. Here, then, are two common people, utterly unknown except by the designation of disciples; and these obscure and unplaced followers of Jesus are the central figures round which are gathered the scenes of one of the most fascinating and instructive events of New Testament story. These men, though followers of Christ, had in all probability little personal knowledge of Him; perhaps,

before this Emmaus incident, He had never addressed them personally. They had seen, it may be with something like envy, Peter, James, and John, and the rest of the Twelve, approach the person of the great Teacher and take their seats next to Him, and follow Him into secret places, where some of His greatest works were wrought, and His inner mind was seen. He had washed the feet of the Twelve; He had never washed their feet. Peter and the chosen band were His Passover guests; and Cleopas and his friend had heard something about a new covenant, in which Christ, as it were, distributed Himself to His chosen ones under the symbols of a loaf and a cup of wine: they had not been permitted to share that last feast of solemn commemoration and farewell; His last words were not spoken to them. They were simply disciples, not apostles.

Bearing in mind their obscurity and inferiority, let us watch them leaving the city at noon. They had evidently stayed so long waiting to see whether the predicted resurrection was a fact. They had heard the story of those women who had been early at the sepulchre, and were astonished that the tomb had been found empty. As for that part of the account which described visions and voices from the other world, they probably set it down to the superstition of the Magdalene and her friends. It is said that the women's story was like an idle tale to the apostles. They had probably planned in their own minds that if there were a resurrection, Christ would announce it in the city by a public and overwhelming demonstration; and for this they had waited until midday. They would now return home together. It is not likely that Emmaus was their home, as they intended passing the night in the inn of the village. Follow these two men, not apostles, but partially

enlightened disciples, leaving the city on the last of three days, during which there had occurred events unmatched in significance even by the creation of the world. They left the city behind them ; the city of miracles, of crimes, and of perdition. The execution on Friday was upon all people's tongues : and groups of men, curious, idle, or earnest, might have been seen in marketplaces, and at the lounging corners of streets, discussing the merits of the now dead Nazarene ; public opinion swaying to and fro, now touching the extreme of applause, now its opposite pole of execration : the friends of Jesus staggered and desolate ; His enemies confident and insolent in triumph ; His observers pondering in doubt and conjecture. Cleopas and his friend can pass through the crowd unmolested, for they were unrecognised, while the apostles were sitting in a room with closed doors ; these were too well known to venture abroad so soon after their Master's trial and death.

And now, fairly on their journey, full of thought and full of sadness, the two men talk together of all those things which had happened. We have an exact description of the character of their talk. They communed and they reasoned, or questioned, together. There was coincident meditation, expressed by each one in the hearing of his fellow : what is called *thinking aloud*, which two friends with full hearts are likely to do in the presence of each other ; not addressing each other at first, but relieving the pressure of accumulating thought by speaking into the air : and yet the two when in audible soliloquy are in the closest mental communion. From speaking to themselves they naturally passed into direct conversation ; and as one subject filled their thoughts, engaged their wonder, and invited their conjecture ; as the feelings of faith, apprehension, and hope

were strongest by turns, they reasoned with each other. The word in the text shows that they debated points of disagreement. They probably had different temperaments, one disposed to dwell on the dark, the other on the bright side. They were incapable of a dispassionate opinion, for they had neither calmness nor knowledge; and in this state of excitement, both right in feeling, and both wrong in judgment, they were overtaken by One who had seen them before they saw Him, who had heard their dispute before they heard His steps: Jesus Himself drew near. He always draws near to those who sincerely talk about Him, and especially to those who talk sadly about Him, either because they are afraid they have lost Him, or because they are tempted to think, as were the Emmaus companions, that He did not rise from the dead, that, after all that has been written about Him, and done for Him, and expected of Him, Jesus of Nazareth still lies in the earth, and that the resurrection is a story of visions, first told by women, and mainly upheld by women. When temptations of scepticism make them sad who are only half believers, and they tell their doubts to each other, and debate their conjectures with mournful earnestness and a longing to find the truth, He frequently draws near; and in some form concealed, it may be in a book, or in a friend, or in an event, He introduces Himself by the old question, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?”

As Cleopas and his friend knew not their questioner, there was nothing to restrain their frankness, and both of them spoke out freely; for the account given to their new friend was evidently furnished by both. He hid Himself to obtain from them outspokenness. He made Himself

a stranger, and yet one part of His question made Him akin to them in a moment: "as ye walk, and are sad." The Master and Friend of the human mind had touched the right chord. "Ye are sad, let Me share the trouble, let us bear it together"; and perhaps putting Himself between them, that He might appear to hear them better, and address Himself to each from the most convenient position, He asked, "What things?" They gave Him a candid and artless narrative; they preached Jesus to Jesus. Their hearts burned afterwards; His heart was burning then, as they touched upon the chief points of the story, the paradoxes that confounded their reason; that He who was mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, should become suddenly weak before God and all the people, should allow Himself to be bound without resistance, condemned without vindication, and crucified with malefactors; and that up to that third day there had been no reliable sign from heaven. The risen Lord saw in these men as they went on with their story, now one speaking and now the other, feeling about for the truth with sorrowful eagerness, near it, touching it, and yet not grasping it, not knowing what they touched,—He saw in these friends the beginning of that glorious work of searching after Him on the part of future generations, which His own presence, hidden at first, should aid, and lead on in clearer expounding of the Scriptures, until the breaking of bread should usher in the complete revelation.

He heard them in silence, not interrupting by correction or question until they had said all they had to say. Why did He allow them to say anything, when He carried within Himself what they wished to know? Why did He say, "What things," when he knew what things? Why keep them in

sorrow and suspense, when one word from Him would have landed them in certainty and joy? Because, by inviting them to say all that was in their hearts, He brought them more absolutely to the limit of their knowledge, made them feel how helplessly they were narrowed to that limit, and drew out a holy impatience to get beyond it. He had the revelation ready for them, but He must make them ready for it. There is an apparent harshness in the first exclamation of His answer, "O fools!" It means, O unintelligent ones. That there was no tincture of scorn or offensive superiority is evident from the words that follow, "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." What an amount of meaning is compressed into the brief expression, "slow of heart to believe"! Not slow of understanding; the mind is quick enough, it is the heart that lags behind. The Scriptures always observe the distinction between the mere thinking faculty and the emotional part of the mind: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. xiv. 1), "They always do err in their heart" (Ps. xcv. 10), "Slow of heart to believe." In our search after truth, and eminently religious truth, there is ever something to clog us from the passions: a prejudice, a lust, a conceit. Rarely do the affections run concurrently with the reason. These two men and the whole Jewish nation had read the Scriptures; their teachers were accustomed to study the sacred books with punctilious literalness; and yet they had not found out that the Messiah must suffer before entering into His glory. It is difficult for us to estimate the force of a Jewish pre-judgment on this subject. Perhaps the best illustration of it is seen in the conduct of the apostles themselves. Even the foremost of them, drinking daily at the fount itself of inspiration, could not understand the problem of a suffering

Messiah. Christ had told them in so many words that He must suffer death at the hands of the Jewish rulers, and be raised from the dead the third day, and to the last they failed to comprehend it. Slow of heart, line upon line, precept upon precept, proof upon proof (*Isa. xxviii. 10*) : there is needed such a momentum of evidence to move the heart along.

And now, having encouraged these two humble followers to open their hearts to Him, and tenderly rebuked the sluggishness of their faith, He opened His heart to them ; *and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Let us observe here, and mark it well, that the Lord Jesus invariably discoursed from the Scriptures, the Old Testament ; not the traditions of the Jewish Church and the commentaries of the rabbins, but the inspired books of the Old Testament canon. What books they were He Himself told the apostles on the evening of the day that He walked with the two friends to Emmaus. "These are the words," said He, "which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me" (*Luke xxiv. 44*). He was now the risen Saviour, invested with a glory that surpassed the vision of prophets. He could have exalted them to the third heaven, and spoken words unutterable by man. But no ; He opened unto them their own Scriptures. Their hearts should glow with holy warmth, not because Christ was speaking, for they did not know Him, not from the surprise of new revelations, for He would give them no new revelations, but from an enlarged understanding and a more hearty appreciation of the Scriptures. A stranger should

tell them what these oracles meant; and, undistracted by the antecedents of the speaker, they should burn with the ardour of admiration and the fire of love as they saw their own Christ in the predictions, the narratives, and the songs of their own books. Christ, the original and subject of all revelation, sent His followers back to the word of God; an unanswerable attestation of the divine authority of the Old Testament, and an indirect though glorious proof that the career of Jesus was not the eccentric course of an enthusiast, but the miraculous fulfilment of prophecy.

It has been the regret of the Church in all ages that the Emmaus discourse is not recorded. It is natural to wish that no words from lips like His should have been permitted to die. We are prone to think more lightly of that which we have than of that which we cannot get. Had that conversation furnished any necessary truth, which has not been given elsewhere, it would have been retained for us. Let us take the comment of the men who heard it: "Did not our heart burn within us, while He spake to us in the way, while He opened to us the Scriptures?" He talked to the men, and He opened to them the Scriptures. Why He should have taken the pains on that remarkable day, the first of His new days, to spend the long hours of an afternoon and evening in explaining to two obscure men all the Scriptures relating to Himself, beginning with the earliest writer, and interspersing His expositions with personal appeals to their consciences and hearts, is a question that can only be answered by His intense love for souls. He thought it not too much to preach one of His sublimest discourses to a woman, and she neither very good nor very wise, and the daughter of an alien race.

And so that afternoon passed away, and the three persons

might still have been seen on the Emmaus road ; and only one is speaking, and He has been speaking mainly for hours, and His two companions think them moments. The village is now first seen in the distance, and the level lines of the setting sun are directly in their faces ; the fore-running shadows of evening are abroad, and the steps of the travellers insensibly slacken, for He is still speaking ; and His hearers are rapt, oblivious of everything about them, seeing only Him, drinking in the music of His words, their moistened eye and quivering lips attesting the birth of new thoughts, the glad possession of a long-sought discovery, and the kindling stir of a new life. The house where the two men must pass the night is now close at hand, and the mysterious stranger shows signs of parting from them, bringing His discourse to an end, and adding the personal courtesies and benedictions of farewell ; but they could not let Him go ! While He made as though He were going farther, they constrained Him. The meaning of the word is, they did everything but force Him to stay. They clung to Him. He must not go ; the night was coming on, He was alone ; Abide with us, spend the night with us ! and the apparent reluctance of their friend was at last overcome ; and, with deep and silent triumph, they took Him in with them.

While the people of the inn were preparing their evening meal, they still hung upon His lips ; every word added wealth of thought, wisdom, and emotion to their souls ; they forgot the exhaustion of the eight miles' walk, their hunger and thirst longed for more of the food He had been giving them. And now, who was He ? After the Eastern fashion, they washed their feet and hands ; and when they sat down to their meal, they did as travellers

whom chance has brought together do in that country, assign the chief place at the table to him who appears to rank highest among them. It was also a rule with the Jews that when three of them ate together, one should give thanks ; and the three sat down, and when the stranger took the bread and spread it before heaven, and gave thanks, they saw in His hands the prints of the nails, and the coincident recollection of His manner of blessing food, and the resuming on His own part of the gracious and glorious expression of look and voice which, once known, could never be forgotten, opened their eyes, and they knew Him, and He vanished from their sight, not from their hearts. He had answered their prayer, "Abide with us." That part of their entreaty which referred to the declining day He had changed from His necessity to theirs, and from the fugitive evening which had come down upon them to the approaching night of their own life's close. Prayer has a grand breadth of application. God never allows it to be restricted to the letter of our own meaning. It was not the last time these two friends offered it to their third friend. Years after Christ's bodily presence had disappeared, He was travelling with them on life's road : sometimes their eyes were holden, and sometimes opened ; but whether they knew Him or not, He was with them, and especially manifest when a shadow fell upon their path ; and when they came to life's last inn, where they must tarry during the night of death, He went into their resting-place to tarry with them, and He is with them now, and with all who sleep in Him.

You and I remember where a stranger first met us. We were full of sin, of sadness, and of doubt. He followed us, but did not speak to us until we had left the city of destruction, the city of scepticism, of scoffing and hard

materialism. We heard the Sadducee say as we passed, "There is no resurrection"; we heard the pharisaic priest, pointing to the splendid ceremonial of his temple, exclaim, "Lo! there is Christ"; we heard the gibe and taunt of a group of idlers, who accosted us with the demand, "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter iii. 4): and we encountered a sadder sight than any of these, grave, earnest, intelligent men, working the problem of wealth and position, but caring for nothing else; using God's sun to light them to their office and back; converting His morning compassions of food and renewed vigour into instruments of self-aggrandisement. We hurried past them all, and got into the lonely road of sorrowful thought. He had followed us, though we heard no footsteps behind, and, overtaking us, He enquired the reason of our sadness, and begged to share grief and solicitude with us. He told us He Himself had been a man of sorrows. We knew Him, and yet we knew Him not. He drew out from us the story of our life. We told Him how wicked we had been, how helpless in wickedness; and that when we cried out for salvation, some laughed at our fears, others endeavoured to reason us out of them; and we were tempted to believe that there was no Christ, no open tomb, that the death-sleep of a sepulchre had never yet been broken; that science had pronounced a miracle to be impossible: we told Him all that was sinful in our hearts, all that was foolish, and all that was perplexing. How patiently He heard us, how gently He rebuked us, how completely He had mastered our state! He spake as no man had ever spoken to us, taking up our difficulties with so forbearing a consideration, disentangling them, showing us the origin of them; and

we seemed to have more discomfort as He endeavoured to soothe us. We grew more vile in our own eyes as the pure heavenliness of His spirit became more apparent; and when He saw our despairing grief, He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in Me" (John xiv. 1); and He showed us His hands and His feet; and we embraced the crucified Lord. He walked with us to our home, and arrived, He made as though He would have gone farther, but we could not let Him go; we clung to Him with the prayer, "Abide with us!" we wanted Him for the home and for the night; and He came in and sat down to meat with us, and made our bread the bread of heaven. He will tarry with us through the darkness, and Himself be the dawn of the coming day.

XX

The Glory of Man, and the  
Glory of God



## THE GLORY OF MAN, AND THE GLORY OF GOD

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away : but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.—1 PETER i. 24, 25.

WE have here displayed in impressive contrasts the glory of man and the glory of God. In both instances this glory is the expression of mind. In one case, the expression, however beautiful, is fleeting ; in the other case, it standeth for ever. The word *flesh* must be understood to comprehend everything that can be included, in a popular sense, within “the glory of man.” The contrast exhibited is not between the mind of God and the mind of man, but between the thoughts, purposes, and works which proceed respectively from each : so that neither our text nor the original passage in Isaiah, in adopting the word *flesh*, must be understood to refer to the mere mortality of successive generations of men. This would reduce the quotation to a poetical reflection, which, however true and beautiful, would scarcely have weight enough to support a position of contrast with the word of God. We must take man at his best.

1. *In his individual form* : as the highest type of creation ; in one important respect standing alone among the works of nature : the solitary example of thought-power. The universe is hidden from us in the plan and extent of its system. It is a sealed book, of which we can only see the seal that

shuts the contents from the eye. The lights of the firmament are not the lights of revelation. Their glory is inscrutable. But so far as we have learned, by a knowledge which has been accumulating for ages, the most imposing of the splendours of creation is a coarse commonplace compared with the human mind. What is it all without mind ? Mind, our mind, invests it with beauty and endows it with voice. It is a curious question into which we shall not enter, What are surrounding phenomena in themselves, and separate from the mind that considers them ? It is enough for us to maintain that their grandeur, significance, and influence are human conceptions. They prove nothing and they teach nothing, except through human observation and reasoning. Man is the god of this world ; and when he is ignorant or doubtful of the existence of any higher being than himself, he worships those forms of power of which he is the creator.

2. *In his collective might.* As there is nothing in creation so fair as the human form instinct with virtuous intelligence, so there is no object that embodies so perfect an idea of power as human society ; men consorting with men and between them maturing the expression of wisdom ; subduing to their own will the forces of nature ; impressing their fancies upon the surface of the earth ; bringing out the grace and ideas of human thought, and making them live in visible forms until nature loses its grossness and becomes itself intellectual like its master. The fairest earthly region is desolate if man be not found there ; and the world, whatever subordinate forms of animation may flit about it, would be a dead world without a living soul. It is too true that although human society gives importance to this planet, and the most perfect images of beauty, progress, and power are

found in the districts of human habitation, the footsteps of men have sown the earth as thickly with curses as with blessings. The power of evil is in equal proportion to the power of good. The angel fallen cannot be less than a demon. Man can lay waste as well as build up; and there is no conceivable horror in the universe, no crisis of disorganisation, no collision or wreck of natural forces, no war of elements, no destruction of nature's produce and life, no eclipse of lights, so direful as the ravages of human passions. Any other disorder is simply terrible to the eye; and there is the redeeming thought that what appears to be evil may be some unknown arrangement by which nature protects herself from greater dangers. But in man's wrong-doing there is mind bent upon wrong, framing mischief by a law: wrong is devised and executed: it is as if a devil were endowed with creative energy, and could do what he pleased with light and air and life, investing them with powers to scathe and blight and destroy, instead of bless. There is a limit to the ravages of material convulsions; peace is born of storms and harvests of floods. But what is the assignable limit to human conflicts? and what is the boon that shall recompense the sufferings and bereavements of war? All this, as we have said, is too true: but if men have disfigured the earth by the wickedness of passion and the infatuation of folly, there is a better intelligence amongst us that rises up against evil; and in no human society is the disorder of vice considered the natural condition of mankind; nay, there is scarcely a human breast in which there is not a protest against it. Human power, therefore, in its highest aspects is a glory upon the earth: pulling up the thorn and the brier and planting the myrtle tree; sending rivers through deserts, until the wilderness and the solitary place

are made glad by the stir of human enterprise, and beautiful by luxuriance and order and progress ; and providing for the permanence of the blessings which it brings by linking the present with the past, improving upon the limits and experiences of forefathers, avoiding their mistakes and carrying out their plans. Thus languages and governments and arts are perfected ; and society attains a symmetry splendid in its dimensions, its harmony, and its strength.

You will see at once how it has come to pass that human greatness in its individual and collective attributes, being the only example which has been brought home to our senses of the ascendancy of intelligence, has become the deity of the world. Away from the illuminations of heavenly truth, the world's religion is the worship of man. It has been so from the beginning. You see it in the ruder imageries of paganism ; but you may detect it also in the most carefully matured systems of faith and morals. In the worship of ancestors, the cultivated Chinese join hands with the aboriginal Indians of North America ; and the deities of the Hindu Pantheon are exaggerated forms of human intelligence and manners. The philosophies of Europe may smile at the simplicity of the Indian venerating the spirit of his forefather ; but he has seen nothing so great as his forefather : and what, I ask, is the essential difference between the ancestral idolatry of the savage and that adoration of the human intellect which is the religion of modern civilisation ? The simple pagan worships the best thing he knows ; his unlettered muse celebrates feats of skill and strength in the chase and in the battle ; and he models his rude heaven upon the pattern of the hunting-ground and the spoils of victory. But when the modern

scientist goes no further than man, he goes no further than the savage. He sees man at his best estate, the pagan sees man at his worst estate; but neither sees anything more than man; and to see nothing more than man is to worship him, and to worship him is superstition by whatever guise we may seek to conceal it.

It is the glory of the Christian faith, a distinction shared by no other religion and no anti-Christian philosophy, that when it has presented just views of human nature it leads us to that which is infinitely higher than ourselves, higher purposes, higher words, and a higher Being. It does not depress man in order to make more conspicuous its descriptions of God. Nowhere does man receive such honour as the Bible ascribes to the human race. Even the most extravagant eulogies of man-worship are mean praise compared with *his* rank who was created in the image of God. But, on the other hand, the writings of the Scriptures, in the severest modes of warning, command us to cease from man: that is, not to attempt to find a shelter in any form of power which he may build up; not to follow implicitly any index which he may display in any of the paths of human action; to distrust his word, and even to despise his authority when he tells us there is no surer oracle than himself. It would be impossible to put this lesson more strongly than in these significant words: *Cursed be man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm* (Jer. xvii. 5). When the voice of prophecy said to the Spirit of prophecy, “What shall I cry?” the Spirit replied, “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isa. xl. 6–8). *The word of our God.* That which is spoken by our God. There are

two qualities of God's word which are brought out by this contrast.

1. *It is unchangeable.*
2. *It is always being spoken.*

1. *It is unchangeable.* When God speaks, His words gather up the future, and they have no past: they stand for ever because they are spoken with a knowledge to which no addition can be made. They are addressed to us; they omit nothing which it is necessary for us to know; it is impossible for any contingency in our history to make it needful that they should be supplemented. They do not show all their meaning to one age; if they were to do so, that age would be bewildered by excess of revelation, by declarations which it would not want, and therefore would not understand: the word of the Lord opens itself to the needs of succeeding generations. Every new phase of history is met by corresponding instructions. The word of the Lord is not an accumulation of wisdom, but a word enriched by an accumulation of *proof*. The word of the Lord is tried as silver is tried; not in the sense of being purified by trial, but in the sense of abiding a *test*. A man receiving silver ore ascertains by the process of intense heat its relative purity, and then submits it to another trial to increase that purity, and then to another, until, by repeated tests, he extracts from it every particle of alloy. The word of the Lord is like that metal when it has been purified seven times. We cannot make it more precious, but we prove its worth. Let any one bring it to the test of meeting his own condition. Let it be a peculiar condition; let it be an unexampled condition; and the divine word shall meet it by a provision exquisitely prepared and abundantly supplied. The word of man is like grass, and the wisdom of man like

the flower of grass ; it is beautiful in its time and beneficent in its use : the Spirit of the Lord causes it to grow ; and the Spirit of the Lord causes it to disappear.

Our little systems have their day ;  
They have their day and cease to be :  
They are but broken lights of Thee,  
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

There is much in man's wisdom that we would not willingly let die : much, indeed, that can never die. The thoughts and fancies of genius enshrined in words of perfect art are carefully treasured and bequeathed from age to age. In addition to their power to charm the taste, they carry with them a certain inspiration which, while it elevates and polishes society, stimulates men to noble deeds : and some of them take their immortality from God Himself ; they are instinct with an ancient wisdom that first came from God. But while they teach and educate and refine, they do not touch the more pressing needs of the human race. *Try them in temptation.* The words of man are wise in experience, and so far authoritative in warning. They describe your adversary, and powerfully depict the humiliation or ruin of defeat ; yet they put no weapon in your hand, they cheer you by no examples of victory : you must nerve your resolution for the encounter, you must present a brave front and stand firm, you must fix your eye steadily and sternly upon the right, and do it at all hazards. But while these instructions and exhortations are excellent, they are like the melancholy efforts of a bystander to save, by shouting at him, an unfortunate boatman, whose boat, already in the rapids of a river, is quietly and irresistibly obeying the far-down currents that must swing it over the cataract. It was never for lack of moral teaching that we fell again and again

under the stroke of our adversary: our knowledge was clear, and every motive was touched that could give authority to knowledge and action to resolution; and yet we were beaten, shamefully and memorably beaten, the best human support broke in our hand like a reed, our defeat was as flagrant and as inevitable as if we had had no culture; for in a conflict like this man at his best estate is vanity.

If you try human words *in a great sorrow*, the fruitlessness of the result, if not equally conspicuous, is equally assured. Take them with you into some valley of the shadow of death: they bring your own thoughts before you, your doubts, your guesses; they lament with you the poverty of human resources and the vanity of human hopes, and in language more perfect than any words of yours; yet the most they can do is to afford you an agreeable distraction. They suspend sorrow for a moment, because for a moment they suspend thinking. But the tide of woe is only the stronger for being checked: you want light to relieve the perplexity of your reason; you want sympathy in which there is not only fellow suffering, but hope based upon a wider knowledge than yours. In such moments you cannot lean upon man: to him you cannot communicate your trial, for a part of the trial itself is your utter inability to make it known to your fellow. If frailty were partial, then let the weak resort unto the strong; but in the crisis of temptation and sorrow all flesh is as grass, even the goodness of man is as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord is unchangeable truth, unchangeable sympathy, unchangeable power.

2. This brings us to the second quality in the word of God which is brought out in the contrast of the text: *it is always being spoken*. It is in one sense wisdom

written out and spread before the eye for study. We have the form, the outward word of truth in these imperishable books. It may be said that God speaks in every truth that is uttered, in every scientific fact that is educed, in every approval or protest of the conscience, and to the ear of intelligent observation, the heavens declare the glory of God : "day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." But there is this difference between the testimony of nature as impressed upon us by the splendid framework of creation and the revelation of the divine Scriptures : the first is what we ourselves collect from the intelligent power, skill, bounty, and equity manifest in the works and ordinances of the universe. It is the testimony of display and exhibition ; it is clear or obscure according as the appreciating faculty of the observer may be prepared to discern it ; like a fine painting, whose beauties come forth to the cultured eye ; it has nothing in it if you bring nothing to it. But the revelation of the Bible is not a display of divine perfections for admiration and study : it is a message framed for man and addressed to man, and it is presented in a thousand aspects to meet the thousand varieties of human condition. It is a system of truth in so far as history and prophecy, parable and exposition all concur to set forth this declaration : "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ; who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. ii. 5, 6). But it is not presented in a systematic form ; it is not constructed upon a plan of which the whole must be mastered before any section of it can be understood. The one truth to which every part contributes its argument and expression may be found in a single passage, and in every possible form. Every tempera-

ment has been consulted, every degree of intelligence has been provided for, every taste has been anticipated. Those who cannot understand the process of reasoning can find the gospel in a narrative; those who are so illiterate as not to be able to follow the consecutive acts of a story can be touched by an invitation of sympathy and a promise of help.

A most conclusive illustration of this fact is given by missionaries who have taken the Bible to the rudest tribes of barbarians. They tell us that the word of God can be made at once intelligible to the savage; and for those who meet this statement with distrust, they have a stubborn reply, in the reformation of manners and the reconstruction of society which quickly follow the preaching of the gospel and the diffusion of the Bible among the populations of such countries as Madagascar and Fiji. This unequalled feature of the Holy Scriptures is the more clearly seen when we remember that they are circulated through translations, which at the best must be imperfect, but which in some cases are made in tongues which had no written character, the translator having to make a language before he could begin his work.

But while we thank God for the written oracles to which the Churches of Christ owe their stability, and the highest literature its existence, the text suggests another quality of the everlasting word which is even more characteristic of its divinity than its universal fitness for mankind: *it is always being spoken.* And here rises before us the living Word, the faithful and true Witness, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. JESUS is the spoken word of God. He is the revelation of the Father, and expresses by His incarnation, His words, His sufferings, His death, and His resurrection, the mind of God toward

the race of man. The teachings that preceded Him were fragmentary, incidental : sometimes they were embodied in passages of history, sometimes they were the inspiration of song, sometimes they were the deposit of symbols ; but their imperfect lights heralded the dawn of complete illumination, and in the fulness of time, in the place of books and scattered hints of wisdom, the Word Himself is made flesh, and dwells among us, and we behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John i. 14). We do not read His sayings as the lessons of a departed instructor whose presence we miss, and whose precepts we interpret through the grammar and style of their language. Our Teacher is in our mind, and He abides there as the living Word. He still speaks : we have the manner, the voice, and the earnest sympathy of a personal presence.

A word written for you is a sign ; the person who has written it is not with you. If it be a word of great moment, you read it with the best helps you can get ; it was written yesterday, it expressed the mind of the writer then. Is it his mind now ? and if so, what is its exact import ? Perhaps you catch it ; perhaps you miss it. But the word spoken to you is the person who speaks it. A perfect word from present lips may be said to contain the soul of the speaker. He can put his mood into his word ; he can supplement the force of his meaning by acting upon the imagination of his hearer ; he can assume the expression that befits the result which he wishes to produce ; he can express authority, sympathy, love, anxiety, by the glance of his eye, the gesture of his hand ; not to dwell upon another advantage, the opportunity of varying his address according to the behaviour of the listener,

who may show doubtfulness as to the meaning of what is spoken, or irresolution, or direct misunderstanding. The word of the Lord is being spoken, because Christ is within us speaking it. The life which He lived with the apostles, He is living with every disciple. He does not recall His earthly life as we recollect past years. He is sensitively conscious of that strange human experience which He condescended to master by Himself becoming human. And as we travel through our life, under the disadvantages of an hereditary taint, a natural bias to evil, and a thousand outward incentives to error, with strength of passion, weakness of will, and a bodily condition clogging the spirit and utterly beyond control, He is within speaking, speaking out Himself; and the word that He speaks is Himself in the condition and for the condition in which you happen to be. He weeps, He rejoices, He is sick, He is overworked, He is tempted, He is despised, forsaken, poor, and forgotten, with you; and His word follows you through the deviations of suffering and conflict, touching all points of your life to redeem that life from destruction and to crown it with lovingkindness and tender mercy.

Jesus is not merely the word of the Lord in the hearts and in the Church of His people, but He is the speech and the discourse of the Most High everywhere. Men do not hear Him, do not heed Him when they hear. Yet if we can escape the noisy and tumultuous present, and by the help of reflection recede into the fixed and quiet past, we find nothing standing but the word of the Lord. The loftiness of men has been bowed down, and the haughtiness of men has been made low, and the Lord alone has been exalted. We see nothing but the exaltation of Jehovah in even and sublime ascendancy from age to age; and the

word which in the past smote down the pride of man, and is the sole living thing left of all that has been, is as fresh and vigorous as ever, and it will go on smiting until every proud cedar of human power and every high tower of human defence shall be laid in the dust. The fool will still affirm that there is no God; the wicked will continue to ask, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? but meantime the unseen will of the Prince of the kings of the earth, the wisdom and the power of God, is quietly accomplishing His unchangeable purpose. "Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up" (Matt. xv. 13); for "all flesh is as grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. . . . The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isa. xl. 6-8).



XXI

## Thanksgiving



## THANKSGIVING

Offer unto God thanksgiving.—Ps. l. 14.

THIS psalm describes an impressive interview between God and His Church. The condition of that Church had become a scandal when it should have been a praise in the earth. The ordinary or uniform operation of its institutions having failed to stop the progress of its decline, the fatal silence of its decay was broken by the trump of God.

There is something extremely touching in the manner in which Jehovah addresses His people on this occasion. He “calls the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof” to be a spectator of the controversy between Himself and Israel. Outside the human world there is loyalty to law, every creature fulfilling the purpose of its existence. But Zion, the perfection of beauty, from which God had shined with a diviner light than ever “was on sea or land,” had become for the moment darkness; not the darkness of negation, but the greater darkness of a broken and misleading light. The Church of God, formed by Himself to manifest the features of His nature to the world, and to publish from time to time the declarations of His will to mankind, had distorted the image of godliness by making the ritual of worship the shield of profligacy instead of the exponent of holiness. The reproof and judgment of the

Most High are not delivered against negligence in the conduct of the sanctuary services, but against the carnal spirit in which they were rendered. There was no penitence in the sin-offerings ; there was no praise in the thank-offerings ; there was no faith in the hearing of the word ; there was no morality in the outward and practical walks of the Church. We may observe also respecting the manner of God's rebuke in this psalm, that although His anger is poured out in a strain of terrific impeachment and invective, it is the faltering resentment of a father instead of the consistent and inexorable condemnation of a judge. The mingled irony and humiliation of the opening sentence will give us the keynote of this indignant exhortation : "Gather My saints together unto Me ; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

This word, as spoken to a backsliding people, must have been "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit" (Heb. iv. 12). They were called saints : the watchword of their nation, distinguishing them from other peoples, was "Holiness unto the Lord" (Zech. xiv. 20). They had made a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice, and this covenant had conferred upon them His name. Where He was not known they were His representatives, and in the perils of their national life He was their Saviour ; nay, more than this, He had betrothed them unto Him "in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies" (Hos. ii. 19). And they now stood before Him, their Redeemer and co-partner in the covenant of holiness, with the old and privileged name upon them of saints, "My saints" ; and yet bearing upon their hearts, upon their ways, and upon their fame, the most shameful infidelity to their covenant vows, and a bitter

satire upon their name and their rank. But although He found them in this condition of apostasy, in the burning sentences of His reproach there are words that bear the traces of the old endearment, and invite a rekindling of the old love: "Hear, O My people; . . . O Israel: . . . I am God, even thy God."

It is remarkable that in beseeching His people to bring their alienation to an end, and in proposing methods by which the reconciliation may be accomplished, the Lord sets before them no ordeal of national chastisement, no costly repentance, no reprisal of public humiliation. All will be well if they will offer unto God thanksgiving; in this spirit they will find the revival of their Church life, the recovery of their holiness, the demonstration to themselves of the divine authority of their laws and the prosperity of their labours. If thanksgiving offered to God be an act of so vigorous and wide an efficacy as to be able to restore a fallen Church, it must be the essential spirit and main function of a Church. It supposes and includes everything which is characteristic of godliness.

1. It is the guardian of doctrine. St. Paul, in a profound analysis of the decline of faith, makes the first step of that decline, unthankfulness. When men knew God, "they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful" (Rom. i. 21). When they ceased to acknowledge God, He was gradually expelled from their thoughts, and soon disappeared from their creed. Atheism and idolatry are not intellectually attained; a man never reasons himself into these positions; they are the necessary results of spiritual insensibility. It is well for the Church to guard her doctrines by definition, and for the purposes of instruction and unity to fix them in formulas and catechisms, but these make a frail

defence where the heart is not right with God ; and even where these are not, the faith is safely housed if there be a doxology in the heart. To thank God is to acknowledge His creative power, His supreme providence, His unfailing bounty, and the multitude of His tender mercies. Thankfulness is not a poetical musing on the divine perfections, but a glad sense of benefits personally received, fixing the attention of the mind directly upon the Giver, and with such dispositions as insure communion with the Giver. There will necessarily be prayer and confiding trust and love. God will be rich towards such a mind : it shall not be allowed to go astray.

But Christian thanksgiving gains a stronger hold upon doctrine from the very truths of which that doctrine is the expression. We receive blessings from God not in the natural way of bounty, as if God should cover us by the shield of His love, because, as the creatures of His hand, we claim the care of Him who made us. Any claim of this kind we have lost. We are fallen creatures ; we are a race of transgressors, and, tried by the mere merit of our position, there is nothing between us and judgment. But Christ, the unspeakable gift of the Father, has placed Himself between us and hell, and at the cost of His own life has redeemed us from everlasting destruction. Thanksgiving for mercies is thanksgiving for Jesus, and for the love that delivered Him up for us all, for with Him the Father freely gives us all things. As Christ is thus the Mediator of our intercourse with heaven, and is the procurer of the forgiveness of sin and of the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come, thanksgiving keeps Him ever before us as the medium of blessing. Every gift refers us to His atonement, every new deliverance wakens within us the preciousness of

redeeming grace, and you may entrust the doctrine of the person and work of Christ to a thankful spirit. Doctrine is in danger when piety is failing. This is equally true in the history of an individual and in the history of a Church. When the heart turns away from Jesus, it invites hostile criticism on the cross. Ungodliness will ever seek the shelter of unbelief, and you may accept it as a maxim that if in this age of free and sceptical thought, personal and experimental religion wanes in our societies and congregations, if this distinguishing feature of a living Church ceases to distinguish us, not all the fences of theological training and the discipline of ministerial inquisition will guard the fidelity of our teaching, or save us from the curse of a variable and shifting pulpit.

2. Thanksgiving is the process of holiness. There may be some difference in our manner of stating the doctrine of holiness, but we are agreed in substance as to the nature of holiness. The root of holiness is consecration to God. This is where it begins: "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). The idea here is the absolute giving away of ourselves to be the possession of another. This is the practical acknowledgment on our part of the purchase by which we cease to belong to ourselves. The blood shed for us by Christ makes us the simple property of Christ. Now this act of giving ourselves to God is not a single transaction, a business concluded once for all, it is living in the spirit of consignment. The act itself, though very simple and intelligible as an abstract idea, involves much more than the mind can apprehend at first. We

gradually understand what it means by the habit of doing it. In a moment of pious emotion we dedicate all to God without reservation. So far as we know, the duty is honestly performed ; afterwards, when the will is crossed or some other trial disturbs us, we become aware of the meaning of what we have done. We discover that the transfer which we made to God of the whole property—ourselves, our children, our money, and our time—must be made over again in detail, the items to be presented as God's immediate will may require them. They were His before, His by our own covenant act, but our spiritual life is characterised by the habit of presenting them. It is only by repeated acts of personal dedication that we can maintain the consciousness that we belong to another. Our freedom of will and the ordinary motives of our life seem to proclaim that we are our own masters, and in the sense of personal responsibility we are. In our intercourse with men we govern ourselves. The faculties of self-control are never in abeyance, and unless we live in the spirit of consecration, we soon cease to feel that we are bought with a price, and the claims of redemption, if not formally disputed, are like the dead letter of a bond no longer in force. This was the condition of the Church described in our psalm. When the people brought their gifts to the temple, they imagined that they were offering that which was their own. It was at the expense of their flocks that the altar was enriched ; it was their gold and silver that maintained the ordinances of religion. This delusion was rudely exploded by the irony of assuming that what they possessed was really their own. “I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goat out of thy folds. . . . If I were hungry, I would not tell thee : for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or

drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and thus bring thy gifts to the Most High." Let the presentation of your gifts be the acknowledgment that you first received them; that you received them in trust as stewards, and not in equity as owners; that you have nothing to give, that you yourselves are a gift, and belong, with all you possess, to the altar.

This psalm was written by Asaph in one of the ungodly periods of David's reign; and its effect upon the Church was probably as decided as the contrition of the king when the rebuke of the Lord smote him by the mouth of Nathan the prophet; and the confession of the fifty-first Psalm may illustrate the groaning of the heart smitten by the two-edged sword of the fiftieth. You may judge what was the character of their sorrow, how it wrought in them carefulness, and indignation, and fear, and vehement desire, and zeal (2 Cor. vii. 11), by the spirit in which they afterwards assisted their monarch to collect materials for the erection of a house for God. We read that the people offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered to the Lord. The sentiment that called out their energies, and made every man, woman, and child a collector and a donor, was consecration; they first gave their own selves to the Lord, and then to the service of the Church by the will of God; and the affluence of the heart so lavishly heaped together the gifts of the hand, that the result astonished the king. "Who am I," cried he, "and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee" (2 Chron. xxix. 14).

Let us now accept the fact that we are holy unto the Lord, that we are the saints of the Most High, that we

have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice. Let us not hesitate to take this position because our experience offers a sad contrast to it. The Lord would unquestionably address us as saints, not because our life answers to the designation, but because the designation defines what our life is expected to be, what work we are expected to do, and what mission to fulfil in the midst of a crooked and perverse world. Let us draw near unto the Holy One, and take from Him once more the seal and the warrant of His name, alive from our dead selves, from the dead sentiments of pride, and selfishness, and the unhappy lusts of the world, reckoning ourselves "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. vi. 11). And may the Apostle and High Priest of our profession do in reality what His servant Moses did in symbol, take His own most precious blood and sprinkle all the people and all the vessels of His ministry! May He produce or restore the consciousness that we are not our own, and then there will be no selection of offerings, no nice allotments of property and service, according to some arbitrary division of claims between the Church and the world; everything, beginning with ourselves, will be told off for the Lord; and that which the Church calls upon us to do or to contribute, will not be so much a gift as the application for a specific service of that which has been previously given. This is the process of holiness. The consecration devotes us to the Lord, makes us the priests and the saints of the temple by profession; and the habit of renewing the sacrifice of ourselves from day to day is the only means by which we are made the priests and the saints of the Lord in reality.

3. Thanksgiving is the inspiration of union. The operation of thankfulness in this direction is seen at once in that

well-known passage: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul" (Ps. lxvi. 16). In our notes of triumph we are not satisfied unless others share the joy. If at such seasons the heart could have its way; if the expression of its gladness were not restricted by pride, fear, or expediency, we should call together our friends and neighbours and say unto them, "Rejoice with me!" (Luke xv. 6.) Their joy increases ours. By a sympathy which is one of the great sources of human strength, they make the subject of our triumph their own. This communion in the property of joy extends to the property of sorrow, to the demands also of work and conflict, and is the essence of Church union. Christian people can never be made a body by the teaching of the pulpit, and by the organisation of public services. Union is not sitting together in the pews, even though there be added unanimity of sentiment in regard to the creed and the service. There must be the mutual possession of the joys and trials of Christian life; and this can be gained only by personal communion. Next to fellowship with God Himself, the most potent support of piety is fellowship with God's servants; and the strongest bond of their union is thanksgiving. The genius of poetry has never been so well employed as when it has given to the emotions of thanksgiving the melody of numbers, and made the joy of one the possession of all. The most shining feature in the character of David is not his royalty or the splendour of his military success, but the sanctification of his sublime poetical gifts for the service of the temple. He sang the depths and the heights of godliness; and in his experience the people found the counterpart of their own life. "One thing," said the poet, "have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after." "One thing,"

sang every member of the congregation after him, "have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple" (Ps. xxvii. 4). This is the prerogative of song, that it not only furnishes a medium for the expression of feeling, but awakens the very feeling of which it is the expression ; and the poet, for the moment, is the master of the memory, the hope, the confidence, and the imagination of multitudes, bearing them away upon the tide of his verse to regions of enterprise, of courage, and of faith, which they could never have reached by the lonely prompting of their own thoughts. This is pre-eminently the power of sacred song. When we sing together the strains of a divine poet, whose heart has been touched by the fire that kindles the muse of seraphs, we are in immediate communion with the Spirit of Jesus : and the psalm, the hymn, or the spiritual song does not end in a momentary delectation of the fancy ; it quickens our faith to hear others chant the assurance of theirs ; it fortifies our courage to assume the victory of others ; it permanently raises the tone of our life to dwell in thought even for a few moments with the societies and choirs of the upper sanctuary.

Triumphant host ! they never cease  
To laud and magnify  
The Triune God of holiness,  
Whose glory fills the sky ;

Whose glory to this earth extends,  
When God Himself imparts,  
And the whole Trinity descends  
Into our faithful hearts.

And then this rehearsal of our experiences in the presen

of other disciples, whether it be in song or in personal testimony, binds us to each other. We have one main topic of thanksgiving ; though each one will show variety in the application of the divine mercy, we have all been sought out and brought up from a horrible pit, our feet have been set upon a rock, our goings have been established. And the Lord hath put a new song in our mouth, even praise unto our God (Ps. xl. 2, 3). We have been lifted to this position in Christ in diverse ways: some of us by an abrupt deliverance executed in a moment; others by the connected steps of teaching and the allurements of godly example. God gave to some of us a home so holy, so illumined by the light of the Shechinah, that we might as well have been born in the sanctuary ; our ears were accustomed to holy sounds, our eyes to holy sights, our understandings to holy ideas ; and when the profane world outside grated upon our senses, and the principles implanted by paternal care were challenged, and the passions so tenderly fenced at home were assailed or seduced abroad, the father's counsel and the mother's prayer were still with us "mighty to save," though they themselves had been removed to the better home ; and we are here to-day, not walking in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standing in the way of sinners, nor sitting in the seat of the scornful (Ps. i. 1), but sitting in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. ii. 6), because the lessons and lives of sainted parents were links that fastened us to the Church of God, and how far soever we wandered, we drew after us "a lengthening chain."

Brethren, our common debt to God's free grace unites us ; our high calling to live a holy life in an unholy world, and to bring that world to the obedience of the faith, unites us ;

our weakness, our liabilities to err and to fail, unite us ; above all, our unshaken faith in the progressing empire of Jesus makes us one, one in labour, one in conflict, and one in the destiny of triumph, of reunion, and of everlasting rest.

XXII

## The Race of Life



## THE RACE OF LIFE

Let us . . . lay aside . . . the sin which doth closely cling to us,  
. . . looking unto Jesus.—HEB. xii. 1.

I HAVE adopted the marginal reading of the Revised Version, which is the best rendering I have seen. “The sin which doth closely cling to us” is an expression in exquisite harmony with the leading image of the passage. We are running a race beneath the attentive and inspiring gaze of a cloud of spectators, who themselves were actors in a similar contest, and are the crowded witnesses of the present runners of the course. In strict propriety of expression, the apostle is writing to those who are preparing to commence the race; but the words apply to them also who are in the race, and to these mainly I shall address my exhortation. I am satisfied that a large number of those who are contending in this race are not maintaining the eagerness, the energy, and the speed with which they commenced the course. Upon them must fall the Galatian reproach, “Ye were running well; who did hinder you” (Gal. v. 7). I do not include in this reference those who have fallen out of the track and abandoned the contest; but rather those who are dragging on under the pressure of some encumbrance, or the freedom of whose powers is checked by some impediment, who are weary, discouraged, doubtful; or are shorn of resolution by that waster of strength, a divided purpose.

I do not assume that in every case the besetment is sin as we commonly understand it. But whatever it be, it has the fatal result of hindering progress. Moreover, it may not be a specific or local frailty, it may be a moral weakness affecting the whole nature, yielding to any temptation, from whatever quarter it comes. It clings closely to us, it embarrasses our steps, it must be laid aside if the race is to go on.

In the study of human career we frequently meet instances where the promise of a splendid success has been cut off by some minor defect, either in the constitution or in the character. The endowments are rare in breadth, in energy, and in genius; but that single flaw reduces the product of the whole to mediocrity. In the course of life, as in a race, there are stages for even running, where the impetus acquired by a previous effort is sufficient to bear us along. It is when the ground changes, and there is a sharp curve, or a steep ascent, or some accident throws upon the path a temporary block, that the worth of our condition is tested. These trials of the ground measure our strength and fitness for the task. If we have not as much force and endurance as will answer to the sudden or accumulating demands of these variations of the ground, the race is lost. You may take a section of a man's life and study it: within that section he is equal to every duty, to every strain upon his nature; and where there is room for action congenial to his talents, he illuminates it with success; the course is straight, the path is level and smooth. There is nothing to mar performance or to check triumph. If your estimate of the man were formed upon the merits of this stage, there would be nothing to qualify its value, or your admiration. But pass with him into the next section; here the conditions

are reversed, and that which really constitutes the man is put upon its trial, his will, his passions, his conscience, his endurance. The way becomes irregular by vicissitude, perilous by abnormal temptations, hard and steep by a new class of responsibilities ; the strain upon the man's virtue is terrible ; he has no reserve force to meet it, and he falls covered with the humiliation of failure.

It was a shrewd saying of the Greeks, "Call no man happy before his death." That is, you cannot safely pronounce judgment upon a man's career before it is ended. You will observe that in this case we fix our attention upon the man, upon his life, rather than upon his work. There is a kind of work which is not affected by the character of the author. The dramas of Marlowe and the poems of Byron are precious possessions of literature. It must be added, however, in justice to virtue, that these works, and the labours of similar writers, would have had a wider field of usefulness, without any diminution of literary excellence, if these authors had added morality to genius. The discovery of a chemist, the victory of a general, the creation of an artist, may each be studied by itself in relation to its historic importance in the department it represents, without taking any account of the character of the person who achieved it.

But the greatest work of a man is his life. You may study it in its entire volume, by dividing it into sections, separating fortunate days from less favoured times ; balancing inequalities by placing successes over against failures ; and thus attain an estimate of its worth by applying to it the doctrine of averages. But if a man's life is to be valued by the influence of its testimony, by its power to raise or to depress the lives of others, we must consider the develop-

ment of its latest form. In a race the popular gaze is strained for the finish.

The words of the prophet Ezekiel will come in here : "When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live ; if he trust to his righteousness, and commit iniquity, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered ; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, for it shall he die" (xxxiii. 13). It may seem harsh, not to say unjust, that a man's righteousness, however long continued and diligently laboured, shall have no history if it be marred by subsequent wrong-doing. But it is none the less true both as a judgment and as a fact, that wrong-doing following righteousness demolishes and effaces it. In this severe sentence the prophet simply interprets the natural sense of mankind. If an eminent man, not a teacher of piety, or even a moralist, but a statesman, betrays public admiration and trust by a flagrant and scandalous breach of morality, the resentment awakened in the popular mind by this humiliating surprise seems for the time to depress the elevation of his former actions to the level of his later infamy. To say the least, his contemporary fame is blasted. It is fair to add that Ezekiel gives us the benefit of the other side : "If the wicked turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right ; . . . he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be remembered against him : he hath done that which is lawful and right ; he shall surely live, he shall not die" (xxxiii. 14, 15).

If all this is true in respect of life regarded as a career of human action and experience, and judged by the natural standards of conduct, it is true more strictly and conspicuously of the Christian life : because Christianity is supposed to renew life. It was the mission of Christ to change the

springs, the attributes, and the course of human life. Christ Himself set the type in His own conduct; a type far surpassing even the ideal of law. It follows that a Christian is a man of new life; he is styled "a new creation" in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. v. 17). His profession, his principles, his aims, and his resources connect him with an inward divinity. He challenges comparison, not by a formal boast but by the name he assumes, with the loftiest example of human morality. Christianity is nothing as separated from the life of the Christian. Its revelations, its sacraments, its literature, its great men, are only important as they bear first, upon the life of the individual, and secondly, upon the constructive results of that life. Christianity has become so extensive a system, its public form is so largely an organisation, that the life of the individual is apt to be lost in the activities of the mass.

It may seem a strange thing to say to a Christian man, You bear in your life the evidence and the reputation of Christ's religion. He points to you as the illustration of its power. He has made you His disciple, His representative upon earth, that men may learn from you who He is, and what He does. In your life He is exalted or dishonoured. The course and the finish of your career will be the course and finish of His career in the judgment of those who surround you, and who take from you their estimate of Him. I can imagine a follower of Christ strongly resenting this attempt to fix so grave a responsibility upon the individual disciple. Is it seriously contended, he may ask, that the frailties, the sinful slowness, and the inequality of my life can tarnish by a single fleck the bright honour of Jesus? Is He to be considered weak because I am weak? Is He to be reckoned a failure because I am a failure? The reply is

immediate and final: it comes from His own lips: "And one shall say unto Him, What are these wounds in Thy hands? Then He shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends" (Zech. xiii. 6).

Let us look round and listen as we look. The name of Jesus is in the air. He is derided by some, He is distrusted by many, by not a few He is ignored, He is opposed by all. Whence comes this curious hostility? Does it arise from a studious consideration of His claims? Is it the fruit of a public opinion which has grown up with the advancement of knowledge and a command of larger means of learning the truth concerning Jesus of Nazareth? Is it that explosion of displeasure and exasperation which follows a long-expected and now conclusive detection of a great imposture? It is nothing of the kind. It is not as the Christ of the gospels, the Christ of history, the Christ of nature and of the human heart, but as the Christ of the Churches, that He is despised and rejected of men. They judge of Him as He is represented in the life, the fellowships, the temper, and the works of those who are called by His name. The reproaches that properly belong to us fall upon Him. He is the perfection of beauty, the fairest of earth's sons; but as seen through us His form and comeliness are marred. We invest Him with the shadow of our defects.

When He prayed for His followers, that they all might be one as the Father and He were one, He added this significant clause, "that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me" (John xvii. 21). The faith of the world is to be the result of the public, the intelligible expression of the unity of His people. The world at first can know nothing of the Father. "O righteous Father, the world knew Thee not" (John xvii. 25). The world can know nothing of the

Son's unity with the Father: but as the Father sent Him into the world to grow up a perfect man, to be understood of men, so He sends us into the world to grow up a perfect society, to be a pattern community which the world shall be able to study, and to compare with its own models of communal life; and upon the comparison to satisfy itself that the Founder of life-principles so pure and universal, so mighty in operation and yet so peaceful in the processes of development, so fertile in blessing and yet so guarded from license, must have descended from God. The world will not be far from the kingdom of God when the spectacle of a united brotherhood in Christ shall compel its witnesses to exclaim, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, a people saved by the Lord!" (Deut. xxxiii. 29.)

But every member of Christ is a constituent element of the great argument that shall at last vanquish human unbelief. The force of that argument will be cumulative, and will depend upon the parts of which it is made up. Every man must contribute his testimony to the power, the brightness, and the triumphant close of the Christian life, for the sake of his own salvation, but especially for the maintenance of the reputation and glory of his Forerunner. I will suppose that there is not one of us who does not desire that the character of his career should from this moment assume a new feature. Whatever may be the precise condition in which you are found, you will join me in the prayer that the Spirit of the Master may breathe into us a new life. That Spirit is present to reanimate a flagging zeal, to refresh a stale and exhausted strength.

There is a question, however, at which we must look with all fairness and sincerity. To pass it over, or to shrink from dealing with it thoroughly, will make every argument, every

lesson that has gone before absolutely useless. Are we entangled, hampered, or impeded by any habit, position, or temptation which we are able to renounce, to change, or to subdue? If there be weakness or want of spiritual tone, is not this explained by something that clings closely to us, that distracts our attention from the business of the heavenly race, that robs us of our strength, that damps the ardour of our enthusiasm, reducing it to mere sentiment? You may possibly carry this besetment with you and be saved at last. *Saved at last!* This hope is the miserable refuge of selfishness; but meantime the growing feebleness of your career encourages the enemies of religion and is a humiliation to Jesus. I say a humiliation to Him, because He remembers the buoyancy and vigour of your earlier Christian life. You wept before Him then with tears of solicitude, avowal, and love. With the sensitiveness of a new-born affection, you were jealous lest a thought should grieve Him; and if you heard anything in dispraise of Him, it was like a sword wound, it pierced your heart. At that time the honour of Jesus to you was like the pure disk of a mirror, and you would not allow a breath of hostility to cast even a fleeting stain upon it. As for service in the cause of the Master, you declined no duty, and refused to select your work. In your eagerness to do anything for Him who had done everything for you, you silenced the importunities of self and accepted what offered. You forgot distinctions of service because love puts all work upon the same plane. You loved with all your heart, and you worked with all your heart.

You ran well in those days. What hindered you, what has produced this change of condition? *The sin that closely clings to you.* It grew up within you, or about you,

by imperceptible gradations. At first it assumed mild forms and passed under specious names—duty, temperament, the requirements of health, the responsibilities of a family, the claims of society ; until now it is so heavy an encumbrance, it falls upon your steps in folds so complicated and unmanageable, that, to say nothing of running the race which is set before you, you are not able to walk without fainting. Christian duty has lost its relish ; prayer has lost its power ; this used to be the natural breathing of the heart, it is now, largely, a ceremony of the lips : Christian fellowship is retained as a Church function, but lost as a privilege.

The question that now presses for an answer is this : Is it possible to recover the old condition, to shake yourself free of everything that impedes your steps ? It is well for us to weigh the exact expression of the text. It is not, Let us take care not to acquire the besetment : it is supposed that we have it ; that it clings closely to us ; and yet the writer urges, “Let us lay it aside.” This means that we may get rid of it at once, for the words *lay it aside* represent a single act, not the last and crowning act of many preceding efforts ; but the immediate execution of the will. Of course if we adopt the ordinary estimate of human power, we are invited to attempt that which is impossible. How can we lay aside by an immediate resolution an impediment that closely clings to us ? We may rid ourselves of it by degrees ; we may live it down in time. So teaches the moralist whose field of study is human nature, whose hope is placed upon the resources of human nature. But the historic examples that are marshalled together in the preceding chapter, and whose illustrious fame is intended to kindle our emulation, achieved their deeds by faith. Their lives were miracles of faith, not monuments of strength, of skill,

and of genius. They dared and endured and conquered as seeing Him who is not seen. They communed with a world where actions are done on another scale than that which is familiar to human experience. The members of that community live under another system of laws: things impossible to us are possible to them; and faith in the invisible God connects us with their society; for "all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark ix. 23).

It is for this reason that the author of the epistle, in exhorting us to perform an apparently impossible act, adopts the easy tone of absolute assurance, as if he were asking us to discharge an ordinary duty: "Let us lay aside the sin that closely clings to us." Here is the secret of this singular manner of address, *looking unto Jesus*. The Old Testament heroes were mighty because they saw Him "who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27); and to New Testament heroes the invisible God is *Jesus*. This passage is another proof that He and the Father are one. "Looking unto Jesus," everything is possible. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13): all things necessary to be done to free my steps from entanglement; to enable me to shake off the encumbrances which make the running difficult. He had a course: what was the prize that crowned it? Bringing many sons and daughters to glory. You may imagine the sympathy with which He looks upon your efforts and struggles and dangers, by remembering that the successful finish of your race is the crown of His rejoicing.

XXIII

## Current Events



## CURRENT EVENTS

Can ye not discern the signs of the times?—MATT. xvi. 3.

It is the calling of the Church to decipher the signs of the times. All the books in which God writes His will are entrusted to the Church for public interpretation. The oracles of the written Scriptures are only a part of the deposit of which the Holy Ghost has made us trustees. The current events of an age are passages of Scripture. Like the Chronicles of Israel, they may be records of error, of disaster, of blood; they may be provocations of national iniquity, or the dread recompense of justice; they belong equally to the book of God, for they are the signs by which the supreme Lord would have us mark the progress of His government. They are related to each other, for that which is merges in that which comes.

For the purpose of our present exposition we shall understand current events as those great movements, with their subordinate occurrences and circumstances, that bear in respect of the future of the Christian faith a leading signification. I need hardly say that this subject belongs to all of us. It surpasses the limits of the Churches. It reaches to every human being known to exist, and to tribes yet to be discovered; it passes down into the regions of the dead, and resolves the question whether our dead have

perished or not; it determines the entire fate of mankind throughout the generations and the ages to come. If we look into it honestly, fearlessly, reverently, we may humbly claim such a measure of the spirit of discernment as will enable us to interpret the handwriting of the finger of God inscribed upon the page of the present time. Among the facts and situations that indicate the present position and the immediate future and destiny of the Christian faith, we notice three.

First, *Christianity is the only living religion in the world.* If there is to be a religion at all, as a permanent foundation of law and morality, it must be the Christian faith. By a living religion we mean a faith that is not only not impaired by the new conditions of modern progress, but is the leading spirit of that progress. The most authoritative and esteemed institution of a nation is the law upon which its life is based; and next to it as an educating force is the literature in which that law is enshrined. As it is unnecessary to ask whether human life has not reached its highest registered attainments in Europe and in the United States of America, so it is equally needless to enquire whether those attainments are not the direct product of the Christian faith. If in that life there are blemishes of morals and of administration, if there has been a prostitution of gifts and laws that degrades humanity and thrusts back progress, it marks in each case a violation and not a result of Christian principle. As in the actual condition of these nations, so in their best hopes. It is not so much that Christianity has helped their growth to the eminence they now command, as that that eminence has been gained by steps inspired by a loftier height of personal and national greatness yet to be touched; for Christianity is the

genius of expansion. What she actually accomplishes is the prophecy and type of a fuller and wider excellence. This is a living religion. Is there another upon the earth?

There are great systems of belief that rise up before us in the East. Hinduism is the prolific mother of religions. Buddhism is her illustrious daughter. But mother and daughter are dead. They are dead to those functions of law and inspiration which minister to the guidance and stimulus of contemporary mind. If it be replied that they count their followers by hundreds of millions, this fact affects not the statement that their life has gone out; because systems of religion which penetrate, nay, which become the structure of society, survive the life that built them. Such systems die first in the collapse of the evidence that supports them. When men cease to believe them, they cease to live; then there follow, with slower or swifter gradations, the decay and breaking up of the establishments, the orders, and the rites in which the departed life once circulated. The enthusiasm of disciples is not the life of the system they celebrate. They may dance round the dead. I should be seriously wanting in learning or honesty if I were to deny to the literature of these old faiths a pure and lofty imagination, to their philosophy researches of thought equally sincere and profound, and to their ethics some of the noblest maxims of morality that were ever framed by the genius of man. I see these gems brought together, and they are analysed in a treatise or made to glitter in a poem. What does this prove? Not the life of the system that grew them, but the curiosity and diligence of the man who collects them.

But is there no vitality in the faith of Mohammed? Are not the activities of Islam in India and Africa the aggressive energies of life? It is yet a living power, but no

longer a living religion. It was a temporary scourge to lash the nations which idolatry had alienated from God. One God, gave a sublime unity to its religious sentiment: one mission, gave to its action intense simplicity of aim: one historic leader, drew to its support the lower elements of personal adoration, unscrupulous obedience, and military ambition. But while in reviewing its history the student must acknowledge the eminence of its rank as a military and political despotism, the service which during a certain period it rendered to civilisation, and particular virtues begotten of its inspiration, such as courage, self-abnegation, and quenchless devotion, it cannot be seriously maintained that Mohammedanism, founded on imposture, maintained by treachery, ratified in carnage, and crowned by licentiousness, has any more place on earth as a religion. There are conditions of race in Bengal, in Java, and in parts of Africa, which favour an active propagandism of its doctrines and its government; but when it attempts to flaunt the crescent in the midst of civilisation and advancement, it fails utterly; for its pretended revelations are contemptible, its policy is impossible, and the annals of its movements are records of intellectual stagnation, of social degeneracy, of remorseless cruelty, and of moral infamy. Let us hear no more about Mohammedanism as a half-way house between paganism and Christianity.

It may seem a superfluous act to invite the disciples of Christ to fix their eye upon a sign so familiar to their observation as the unrivalled position of Christianity among the religions of the world. But the habit of looking at this glorious appearance, "a light that shineth in a dark place," may make us unconscious of its significance. The lesson it reads to the churches is twofold: it furnishes the strongest

motive to unity, and it establishes an unanswerable proof that the one religion which lives through the ages, witnessing the birth and death of all other faiths, is kept alive by the immediate inspiration of heaven.

But I appeal with earnestness to the candour of those who assail the authority of the Bible and the foundation of the Church ; for the sign to which we invite their attention is acknowledged by the most thoughtful of the class to which they belong. They decline to admit any revelation from heaven, and reject all religions alike ; yet they are not only compelled to place Christianity higher than its rivals, but to ascribe to its evidences an argumentative probability, and to its influence a breadth of beneficent force, to which the credentials and character of other faiths can have no pretension. We address these opponents with confidence, because among them there are shrewd men, there are learned men, there are men of the world. We appeal to scientists, historians, and statesmen. Some of them are expert in the reading of the astronomical heaven, others of the political heaven ; they are the prophets of foul and fair, of storm and peace. Let them look at the ascending orb of Christian truth as it shines alone in the vast expanse of religious thought. We say alone, for the meteors that dazzle and expire around it, and the clouds that seem to invest it, do not belong to the same heaven.

We ask from these men that the power they now employ in discrediting its celestial mission be engaged in investigating its nature and in following its track. It is unworthy of the courage, the curiosity, the patience, and the high impartiality with which science is credited, to dismiss, as if it belonged to a question of party strife, an event that embraces, and probably determines the highest interests of humanity.

2. *The ascendancy of Christian sentiment.* By sentiment I mean an unwritten impression, feeling, or judgment, which animates the public mind and guides the decisions of public opinion. In recent years Christian sentiment has grown both in inspiration and in authority. It is better instructed and more widely supported. It is the unconscious tribute which Jesus receives from the world. Those who are niggard in their praise of Him will applaud the principles which His teaching established. He reigns in sentiment where as yet He does not reign in doctrine and in worship. There are portentous forces of evil in communities of men ; there is yet a greater power that holds men back from an uttermost license and excess. There are also seed-thoughts of good in the most degraded, the most wicked, and the worst. The same power that almost unconsciously restrains the evil silently invites and sustains the good. It acts beyond the jurisdiction of the magistrate, and where the voice of the Christian preacher has yet not been heard. In our Parliaments it is not formally invoked, yet it is the genius of the legislature. It inspires the charities of the land ; it is the secret standard of personal honour ; it raises the voice of censure when rank has stained its escutcheon, when power has violated its trust. It is not equally influential, but it is equally present in the laws, in the literature, and in the social codes of all Christian nations. We may conceive, but we cannot measure, the power of its appeal, spoken and unspoken, against the sins of peoples and the crimes of states. It distinguishes truth from expediency, but does not distinguish the cherished desire from the act. It seems to charge itself with the guardianship of humanity ; for irrespective of the assumed rights of nations and tribes, if these privi-

leges involve the abuse of the higher rights of mankind, it rises like a monarch and claims to redress the wrong. It has united the leading governments of Europe against the infamous slave commerce of Africa ; its voice has made this country ring in protest against the greed and cruelty that traffic on the simplicity of aboriginal races.

This is Christian sentiment. Its foundation is Christian doctrine, from which it breaks into a thousand currents. Many of them are hidden and noiseless, others find conspicuous or noticeable tracks, and are known under different names. Where research has only partly done its work and left imagination to do the rest, they have been assigned to different sources. It is not necessary, nay it is not possible, for me to follow the subtle ramifications of this mysterious law of the good. It is not the natural conscience ; it is the informing minister of that conscience. Those who recognise its power, but deny its heavenly birth, may tell us if they can whether the missionaries who brought Christianity to Europe found it on their arrival ; and whether the modern apostles of Christ discover it, I will not say among the barbarous clans of Africa, or the islanders of the South, but among the polished peoples of the East. It must not be confounded with the imperfect ethics of non-Christian faiths, nor with the moral perceptions and sense that, in forms more or less elementary, are co-extensive with humanity itself.

It is a distinct Christian power, springing from the word and Spirit of Christ, fostered by tradition, freshened here by teaching, supported there by example, and in its more complete expression found among the disciples of Jesus. It will not be denied that in the direction and inspiration of personal conduct, and in the edification and defence of

national morality, nothing has yet been found to take its place. Where you discover parts or segments of moral truth in pagan nations, in the customs or literature of non-Christian countries, the most satisfactory account of these fragments connects them with those ancient revelations to man that were summed up and perfected in Christ. This is further illustrated by a fact which ought to set at rest for ever the divine origin of Christian sentiment, that in what may be conceived as its mature development, it is foreign to no race; it is everywhere at home, not to make all nations alike, not to touch that beautiful variety in the genius of races which is determined by climate and the original incidents of geographical allotment, but to guide the distinguishing types and manners of human life into perfect form.

The ever-growing ascendancy of Christian sentiment may not be a conspicuous object to the eye that traverses quickly the expanse of facts now in sight; but we venture to think there is no sign that so clearly attests the near supremacy of Christ. Not the leaders of Churches only, but every preacher and pastor must study it with close observation and divine sympathy. In some of its forms it is not apparent; we must go in search of it; and if we leave our *shibboleths* at home we shall have little difficulty in finding it. In what has been considered mere desert, if we look narrowly, we shall detect here and there a spring of Christian sentiment as pure as that which refreshes our own Churches. It is our calling to make ways for it to its own river of life.

Of late years the students of social phenomena have largely increased. In every department both of science and of letters there is a somewhat novel enquiry accompanying their present forms of progress. How can we make our studies instruments of education and advancement for the

masses of the people? This direction of learning towards the strange abodes of poverty and ignorance has already borne precious fruit; and not the least valuable result has been the creation of a motive to draw studious men from their retirement to mingle with the people, to learn their needs and capacities by personal observation. Among these students of social problems are sincere philanthropists who deny that the people have any personal God, who imagine they are doing humanity a service by discrediting the authenticity of the gospels and impugning the authority of Christ. We invite them to study those rudiments of goodness which even among the very poor find their opportunity of expression. When some calamity, such as the explosion of a mine, a disaster by railway, flood, or fire, spreads death around, and suffering follows in every aspect of misfortune, then sympathy, courage, and self-abnegation shine out in noblest forms of help. Vice for the moment is shamed out of sight; the roughest natures breathe gentleness; and charities abound as high-born in delicacy and tact as if they had been bred in courts, and as holy as if they had been fostered in Churches.

Here is a power whose presence these socialistic philosophers are compelled to recognise and bound to explain; a power which belongs not to the past in any sense in which it belongs not to the present; a power which not only shows undiminished vitality, but whose supremacy over men and governments is to-day the most urgent need of the world. Let me say to these men that when they contend for the atheistic position of man's intellect, they contend for the extinction of Christian sentiment. If they cherish the contemplation of a world without God, they must not shrink from the logical sequence of a world without righteousness.

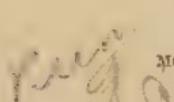
3. *The action of Christian work.* I have endeavoured to prove that Christianity is the only living religion in the world. I have shown that a far-reaching sentiment, great and subtle, springing from Christianity and surrounding it with ever increasing volume like an atmosphere, is a sign of its ultimate supremacy. The third sign upon which I invite you to look is the action of Christian work. I can only imperfectly represent it. It is multiform beyond the power of classification ; its acts of direct initiation are not to be computed, and its lines of subsequent operation are illimitable. I will say first, that I cannot restrict the class of Christian workers to those who have upon them the credentials of a particular denomination. In our ordinary review of the advancement of Christian work, we are disposed to consider the plot of ground upon which we labour as the boundary of cultivation, and all outside, wilderness. There are well-meaning believers who deny to the Roman Church a place among the Christianising forces of the world, who denounce its errors as darker in colour and more pestilent in mischief than the blackest superstition of paganism. It is only fair to add that a reciprocal charity proceeds from the leaders of this community towards every other form of Christian profession. I repudiate equally the fanatical bigotry of both. There are Anglican priests of whom the most charitable thing that can be said is this, that they know not what spirit they are of ; who regard Dissent as a spiritual crime surpassing the sin of witchcraft ; who, judging from their teaching, are prepared to maintain that when the crucified Lord had overcome the sharpness of death, He opened the kingdom of heaven, not to all believers, but to all Churchmen. But I have already stated that though this satire upon the fellowship of saints is largely answer-

able for the atheism of the times, we hail the signs of a better spirit,—a spirit whose coming may suffer a temporary check from the convulsions of an expiring bigotry, but which only gathers force from every such resistance, and will, ere long, come in like a flood and sweep away hateful partitions that divide brethren! “The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim” (*Isa. xi. 13*). Welcome the service done for our Leader, not of a particular tribe, but of the entire commonwealth of Israel! Any work by any worker, whether it be in united demonstrations or in single testimony, in systematic charities or in personal acts of relief, shall have a place in our prayers. Christian workers! No man can number us; no statist can classify us; no power can stop us. We are a universal Christ.

Let us watch the action of Christian work upon any one of those conditions of life that determine the weal and progress of mankind; for instance, its action upon the thought of the world. We are pointing out the universal action of Christian work as a great sign of the times, but the thought upon which it acts is another sign. The thought of the world! It is invested by a profound pathos. The philosopher is thinking about it, the schoolmaster is educating it, the writer is entertaining it, the moralist is scolding it, and the villain is debauching it. What is its condition? Restlessness, everywhere restlessness. Whatever else has been done for it outside the direct action of Christian work, it has found no guide to a place of rest.

Christian work, in the name of the great Master, delivers this message to the thought of the world: that the human mind is not in an eternity of darkness; that it was never

created to be whirled in a bottomless sea of questionings ; that it was never formed and inspired to be tossed upon the vicissitudes of life, ignorant of the meaning of its existence, and thus, though at the head of all creatures, to be the one solitary being that lives without having appended to it some explanation of its life ; that its very restlessness is a proof that "a rest remaineth." Where is the significance of this sign ? In the fact that, except the doctrine and voice of Jesus, no philosophy, no system of morals, no religion, professes to have any light upon the destiny of thought. Christianity finds thought upon the boundary of the hereafter, forsaken by every other guide, wandering alone, as if reserved for the blackness of darkness for ever (Jude 15), and leads it back to God, its natural home, its *dwelling-place in all generations*. I might follow the action of Christian work upon the sufferings of the world, upon the governments of the world, upon the literature of the world, and upon the commerce of the world. But the sign which these movements of Christian activity project upon the space of human life is this, that our blessed religion, the only living religion, with its all-prevailing and subtle force of sentiment, is not a temporary federation to be succeeded by other forms of beneficence, but a ministry of universal love and renovation, which appropriates as its own all conditions and all ages of humanity, and shows by the unexampled swiftness and power of its recent achievements, that it is hastening to accomplish its sublime task in changing the kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. xi. 15).



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